

**NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE SHORT STORIES  
OF JUAN RULFO**

By

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The purpose of this dissertation is to show that the disorientation and confusion which the reader experiences when he reads the short stories of Juan Rulfo are the result of Rulfo's manipulation of four technical elements. One chapter is devoted to each of these, and one chapter each to the introduction and conclusion.

The first chapter briefly recounts the high points of Rulfo's life. It also examines briefly the major criticism which is relevant to the topic under study, as well as delimiting the twenty stories to be studied. These are, besides the fifteen published as El llano en llamas, five sueños: "Un cuento," "El día del derrumbe," "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel," "Un pedazo de noche," and "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas."

The second chapter presents a study of Rulfo's use of point of view. It is shown that the basic characteristic which can be ascribed to point of view in these stories is instability. It changes frequently and often subtly. Rarely is a story told from just one point of view, although one can find frequent statements to the contrary among Rulfian critics.

Chapter III deals with the time element. Three general time-categories are established, and the stories are classified within them. The category with the fewest stories in it consists of those stories in which time flows at uneven speeds. The next largest category consists of stories which are atemporal, and the largest consists of stories in which there is a partial suspension of time. This group is seen as having two types of stories within it: those in which time exists on dual levels, and those in which it exists just on one level. The idea that time is suspended in all of Rulfo's stories, common in Rulfian criticism, is rejected.

Chapter IV deals with the way in which the reader receives the facts of the story. The author's manipulation of these varies from completely withholding them, to forcing the reader to deduce them from the story, to introducing them unexpectedly. It is shown that the difficulty which the reader experiences in establishing and ordering the central facts of the narrative derives from the way in which the author introduces them.

The fifth chapter considers the setting in two very general categories. The first category includes settings which are characterized as skeletal. This type of setting is suggested by giving several of its elements without any details. A typical device in the creation of

this type of setting is the use of unmodified nouns, such as el corral or una silla.

The second category includes settings which are more completely described but which are composed of elements of nebulosity, such as fog, smoke, haze, or dust, and which tend to shroud the physical surroundings from the reader's view. It is observed that about half of the stories belong in the first category of setting, and half have settings which are from both categories.

Chapter VI concludes that the complexity with which Rulfo tells his stories is masked behind their apparent simplicity. The satisfaction which the reader receives from these stories depends largely upon his willingness to work with them in order to appreciate Rulfo's creative ability.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A brief biographic sketch of Juan Rulfo will provide an interesting preliminary to the study of his short stories, and may help provide insight into the nature of his literary creation.

Juan Nepomuceno Carlos Pérez Rulfo Vizcaíno was born in 1918 in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, the son of Juan Nepomuceno Pérez Rulfo and María Vizcaíno Arias. His use of the surname Rulfo can be attributed to his interest in family history,<sup>1</sup> which has led him to discover that Juan del Rulfo, an eighteenth-century Spanish adventurer, was probably his first ancestor in the New World.<sup>2</sup>

When he was just a small child, the Cristero war left Rulfo an orphan, so he went to live with his grandparents. Under the direction of French nuns, he progressed smoothly through grammar school, but just as he entered high school a disruptive student strike caused him to move to Mexico City at the age of fifteen.<sup>3</sup> After finishing high school there, he found a job at the Archivo de la Secretaría de Gobernación. This was very fortunate for Rulfo because it was there that he met a young writer named Efrén Hernández. Not only was Rulfo able to learn much about writing from Hernández, but later, when Hernández was one of the directors of the literary magazine América, he helped Rulfo to publish some of his first stories.<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to achieve some measure of financial security, Rulfo

studied accounting, but at the same time managed to attend some university literature courses.<sup>5</sup> He has held numerous jobs, and presently is employed by the Instituto Indigenista. A reserved, withdrawn man, Rulfo has frustrated the efforts of many critics to meet with him and discuss his works. His reticence may reveal a lack of confidence which could explain his relatively meager production to date.

In spite of this lack of production, he stands today as a major figure in Spanish-American literature and even in world literature, his works having been translated into numerous languages, including English.<sup>6</sup> In November, 1970, he was awarded Mexico's Premio Nacional de Letras, a prize which carries great honorary and monetary significance.<sup>7</sup>

Rulfo's fame is based principally on his collection of short stories El llano en llamas<sup>8</sup> (1953) and his short novel Pedro Páramo (1955). In addition to these, five other stories were published as suelos. The first was "La vida no es muy seria in sus cosas," published originally in 1942 in an obscure literary magazine, Pan (Guadalajara). This version is unavailable, but fortunately the story was later published in América,<sup>9</sup> which is the version referred to in this study. "Un cuento" appeared in Las letras patrias in 1954,<sup>10</sup> "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel" was published in Cuadernos médicos in March, 1955,<sup>11</sup> "El día del derrumbe" came out in México en la cultura in August of the same year,<sup>12</sup> and "Un pedazo de noche" was first published in 1959 in the Revista mexicana de literatura,<sup>13</sup> although it was written in 1940.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to these works, he is known to have worked on two other novels. The first of these, El hijo del desconuelo, was

written about 1937,<sup>15</sup> and dealt with life in Mexico City. Rulfo thought so ill of the work that he destroyed it.<sup>16</sup> He is known to be working on another novel, La cordillera, which still remains incomplete, even though notices of its forthcoming publication can be traced back to 1965. He has recently announced the forthcoming publication of a new collection of short stories, Los días sin floresta.<sup>17</sup>

Much of what has been written on Rulfo's stories has dealt with technique, but only in a general way. Emmanuel Carballo, in an article entitled "Las letras mexicanas de 1949 a 1954," published in Ideas de México, states:

En El llano en llamas están ausentes las asperezas técnicas, los anacronismos de que se valen cuentistas de la hora, estando presentes, en cambio, las técnicas que han orientado la novela y el cuento por nuevas sendas.

El monólogo interior, la simultaneidad de planos, la introspección, el paso lento, son usados por Rulfo con notables resultados. Hay cuentos que son un puro monólogo; otros que siendo monólogos, admiten esporádicamente el diálogo, sostenido por la misma persona que cuenta alternando con su memoria que reconstruye escenas y situaciones; en toda la colección se observa el paso lento, el triunfo de las figuras sobre la trama, del autor sobre el tiempo.<sup>18</sup>

Carballo has identified and listed some of the basic elements of Rulfo's narrative technique without attempting to elaborate on them or explain them. This is true of most of the articles which deal with Rulfo's stories.

Among the serious studies of Rulfo's technique, Carlos Blanco Aguinaga's article "Realidad y estilo de Juan Rulfo" (1955) is the earliest.<sup>19</sup> (A revision of this article appeared in 1969,<sup>20</sup> but the revised edition is essentially the same as the original, with only

a few minor changes.) In his articles, Blanco Aguinaga analyzes "Luvina," "Diles que no me maten," "Talpa," and the novel Pedro Páramo. His perceptive analysis of Rulfo's use of repetition to achieve a suspension of time provides valuable insight into Rulfo's technique. However, his analysis with regard to "Talpa" has been extended and clarified by Donald K. Gordon.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Blanco Aguinaga's attempt to apply his findings equally to all twenty stories<sup>22</sup> would seem rather tenuous (see Chapter III).

In 1956, James East Irby presented an M.A. thesis to the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México entitled La influencia de William Faulkner en cuatro narradores hispanoamericanos.<sup>23</sup> Rulfo is one of these four narrators, and Irby finds Faulknerian influence in Rulfo's world view, its reflection in structure, the recalling of incidents of the past, the frequent use of a witness narrator, and the literary depiction of the lowest type people of his native area.

Luis Leal published "El cuento de ambiente: 'Luvina' de Juan Rulfo" in 1962. This brief article attempts to show that "Luvina" represents better than any other contemporary Mexican short story, the story of atmosphere, in which plot, climax, and characters are minimized, and total importance is given to atmosphere, around which the narration is organized.<sup>24</sup>

In an M.A. thesis presented to the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, "Cinco cuentistas mexicanos" (1963), Fareed Ahmed Khan makes some interesting observations on Rulfo's technique, but does not deal with all the stories which Rulfo has written. He also tends to include too many marginal items under technique, such as Rulfo's mexicanidad, and fails to investigate other essentials with sufficient profundity.<sup>25</sup>

Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá has dealt with technique in four of Rulfo's stories in his book El Arte de Juan Rulfo. His chapter on "En la madrugada" contains an excellent analysis of the time element of the story and how its use results in confusing the reader. He terms "No oyes ladrar los perros" Rulfo's most perfect story, and points out its dramatic and stylistic condensation. Rodríguez-Alcalá finds in "Luvina" an ancestor of Pedro Páramo, and compares the town of Luvina with Comala, the setting of the novel. He says that the uniqueness of the longest of Rulfo's stories, "El llano en llamas," resides in the fact that it is the only one which ends with a basic shift in the character of the protagonist, and on a note of hope.<sup>26</sup> The only point of disagreement with Rodríguez-Alcalá would be in regard to the innocence of Esteban in "En la madrugada." The omniscient narrator corroborates Esteban's account of Justo Brambila's death (p. 52), thus removing the doubt about Esteban's innocence which Rodríguez-Alcalá feels.

The critic who has dealt most extensively and intensively with Rulfo's stories is Donald K. Gordon. His 1967 article "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista"<sup>27</sup> deals with Rulfo as a story-teller in general, and specifically with his techniques in "El hombre." Most of this article was later incorporated into his dissertation "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo."<sup>28</sup>

In his dissertation, Dr. Gordon attempts to show how Rulfo presents the peasant's miserable life through structure, style, language, and narrative devices. He organizes his thesis around six modes of narration which he perceives in the stories: third-person narration, absolute monologue, monologue with dialogue recalled by the narrator, dialogue, tri-modal narratives, and stories on different but

simultaneous planes. Although at first this organization would seem well-devised, a closer inspection reveals numerous flaws in it.

It is unnecessary here to enter into all of the discrepancies in the classification which Gordon has set up; one example will suffice to demonstrate the point. He analyzes "No oyes ladrar los perros" in the chapter entitled "Dialogue." Thus he gives no recognition to the important part which an omniscient narrator plays in the creation of atmosphere in the story. It is certainly not a dialogue in the same sense as "El día del derrumbe," in which the whole story is an exchange between two characters without an omniscient author.

Another article of value on technique in Rulfo's stories is "Yuxtaposición como técnica en un cuento de Juan Rulfo: 'Macario'" by Stephanie M. Robbins.<sup>29</sup> The author attempts to show that the structure of the story is organized according to a series of juxtapositions which are found both within and outside of the work itself. Except for the fact that she ignores until the end of the article the protagonist's obvious mental derangement, which is basic to understanding the story, the article is useful in ordering the chaotic series of images which constitute the story.

The present study has as its purpose to demonstrate the use of narrative techniques in the creation of reader disorientation in Rulfo's stories. Although Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá has already touched upon this point in his analysis of "En la madrugada" when he affirms that ambiguity and borrosidad are the essential notes of Rulfo's narrative style,<sup>30</sup> he does not categorize and analyze the specific elements which produce these effects. This dissertation will attempt to show that narrative techniques in the areas of point of view, the

time element, methods of communication, and the creation of setting result in leaving the reader with the feeling that what he has read is illusory, deceptive, ambiguous, blurred.

Any study demands that the material in question be carefully delimited. In the case of Juan Rulfo's short stories, the only one which may need a special explanation of why it is included among the body of material to be studied is "Un cuento." This story was originally published as a fragment of the novel Una estrella junto a la luna<sup>31</sup> (eventually published as Pedro Páramo) and does in fact bear a remarkable resemblance to the first section of the novel. Thus the question which must be considered is whether or not "Un cuento" represents a truly autonomous work or is merely a preliminary draft of a part of Pedro Páramo.

Donald K. Gordon has dealt very well with the problem in his dissertation.<sup>32</sup> He systematically analyzes textual differences between "Un cuento" and Pedro Páramo, pointing out changes from one to the other which reveal an accommodation to the requisites of each genre. He also states that "the short story's overriding importance is in its totality as the seed of germination for the novel" (p. 151). He nevertheless comments on and considers the story as an entity itself, a position which, on the basis of his deft analysis, leaves no room for disagreement.

We shall begin our study with a consideration of Rulfo's use of point of view. A story must always be told by someone, and the relation of the teller to the story can have a major impact on the reader's reaction to the story. The narrator links the reader with the story, so we will begin by studying this link. We shall then

proceed to examine the time element. Always a complexity, Rulfo's depiction of time forces the reader to be constantly alert for an unexpected interpretation of temporal reality. Following this section comes a consideration of the way in which the information of the story is furnished to the reader, and the way in which the reader becomes disoriented through Rulfo's manipulation of this information. Finally, a look at the settings of the stories is an essential part of the study.

An alternative approach to this study would be to deal with each story as a unit, examining each of the four basic technical elements that Rulfo uses to achieve reader disorientation. The advantage of such an approach is that the unity of the individual stories would suffer less damage than it suffers in the present study. Such an approach, however, offers certain obstacles and for that reason was rejected as a method for purposes of this dissertation.

The first disadvantage of such an approach is that it offers no logical, convenient principle of organization. We have already noted that Donald K. Gordon, in his dissertation, tries to organize the stories according to narrative mode. However, this type of organization is less than satisfactory due to Rulfo's frequent mixing of mode within a story. Such an approach is probably better adapted to articles on a given story or stories.

Another and perhaps more significant disadvantage of that approach is that one can easily lose sight of the technique itself while becoming absorbed in its application in a story. This type of approach is, again, better adapted to a study whose purpose is to



explicate a single story or a small group of stories, rather than to a study which encompasses them all.

A final observation, on the division of the stories into parts: most of the stories have formal divisions between their parts. The following stories do not: "Macario," "Nos han dado la tierra," "Es que somos muy pobres," "Acuérdate," "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel," "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas," and "El día del derrumbe." In the comments on these stories, references to the various parts are accompanied by the appropriate explanation of the points of division.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin-American Writers (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 250.

<sup>2</sup>María Teresa Gómez Gleason, "Juan Rulfo y el mundo de su próxima novela La cordillera," ed. Antonio Benitez Rojo, Recopilación de textos sobre Juan Rulfo (Havana: Las Americas, 1969), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup>Harss and Dohmann, p. 253.

<sup>4</sup>Boyd G. Carter, Literatura hispanoamericana a través de sus revistas (Mexico: Ediciones de Andrea, 1968), pp. 150-151.

<sup>5</sup>Harss and Dohmann, p. 253.

<sup>6</sup>In 1967, the University of Texas Press published George D. Schade's translation of El llano en llamas with the title The Burning Plain and Other Stories. Pedro Paramo had been previously published in 1959 by the Grove Press. It was translated by Lysander Kemp and published with a subtitle: Pedro Paramo: A novel of Mexico.

<sup>7</sup>Boyd G. Carter, "The Hispanic World," Hispania, 54 (May 1971), 380.

<sup>8</sup>Juan Rulfo, El llano en llamas (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953). All quotations in this study refer to the ninth edition (Colección Popular), 1969.

<sup>9</sup>América. Revista mensual. Tribuna de la democracia, No. 40 (30 June 1945), pp. 35-36. All references to this story in the present dissertation refer to the edition indicated.

<sup>10</sup>Las letras patrias, No. 1 (January-May 1954), pp. 104-108. All references to this story in the present dissertation refer to the edition indicated.

<sup>11</sup>Cuadernos médicos, 1 No. 5 (March 1955), 57-61. All references to this story in the present dissertation refer to the edition indicated.

<sup>12</sup>México en la cultura, No. 334 (14 August 1955), pp. 3, 5. All references to this story in the present dissertation refer to the edition indicated.

<sup>13</sup> Revista mexicana de literatura, No. 3 (September 1959), pp. 7-14. All references to this story in the present dissertation refer to the edition indicated.

<sup>14</sup> Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," Diss. University of Toronto, 1970, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, El arte de Juan Rulfo: Historias de vivos y difuntos (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1965) p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Harss and Dohmann, p. 256.

<sup>17</sup> Iván Restrepo-Fernández, "La cacería de Juan Rulfo," Mundo nuevo, 39-40, 43-44.

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Carballo, "Las letras mexicanas de 1949 a 1954," Ideas de México, 2 (September-December 1954), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, "Realidad y estilo de Juan Rulfo," Revista mexicana de literatura, No. 1 (September-October 1955), pp. 59-86.

<sup>20</sup> Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, "Realidad y estilo de Juan Rulfo," ed. Jorge Laforgue, Nueva novela latinoamericana I (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 1969), pp. 85-113.

<sup>21</sup> Donald K. Gordon, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, "Realidad y estilo de Juan Rulfo," Revista mexicana de literatura, No. 1 (September-October 1955), pp. 59-86. All subsequent references to Blanco Aguinaga's article refer to the original article, not the revision.

<sup>23</sup> James East Irby, La influencia de William Faulkner en cuatro narradores hispanoamericanos (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1956), pp. 132-163.

<sup>24</sup> Luis Leal, "El cuento de ambiente: 'Luvina' de Juan Rulfo," Nivel, No. 38 (25 February 1962), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Fareed Ahmed Khan, "Cinco cuentistas modernos," Unpublished M.A. thesis Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México 1963, pp. 97-122.

<sup>26</sup> Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, pp. 13-88.

<sup>27</sup> Donald K. Gordon, "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista," Cuadernos americanos, 155, No. 6 (November-December 1967), 198-205.

<sup>28</sup> See note 14.

<sup>29</sup>Stephanie M. Robbins, "Yuxtaposición como técnica en un cuento de Juan Rulfo: 'Macario'," Insula, No. 286 (September 1970), p. 10

<sup>30</sup>Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, p. 23

<sup>31</sup>See note 10.

<sup>32</sup>See pp. 141-152 of Gordon's dissertation.

## CHAPTER II

### POINT OF VIEW

While it is true, as critics frequently state, that Rulfo often employs the first-person point of view in his short stories, such an affirmation fails to give an accurate picture of the full use which he makes of this element of technique. Point of view in Rulfo is basically unstable, and this instability is what produces the effect of misleading and confusing the reader. It often changes from one person to another, or what is at first the apparent point of view turns out to be merely an illusion. Other times there is no identifiable point of view at all. It is these techniques which we will examine in this chapter, indicating their effect upon the reader.

In the first section, we shall examine those stories in which the establishment of point of view presents a particular problem. It is typical of Rulfo that he likes to postpone, for as long as possible, allowing the reader to know precisely what he is doing with his narration. He does this in the second part of "El hombre." The first part of the story ends with third-person narration. The second part then begins with a first-person narrator, a shepherd. The only hint of a change which the reader gets is a blank space between paragraphs, which he does not know how to interpret. Further, the change in point of view is not evident until the second paragraph:

Parecía venir huyendo. Traía una porción de lodo en las zancas, que ya ni se sabía cuál era el color de sus pantalones.

Lo vi desde que se zambulló en el río. . . .(p.43)

The sudden revelation of point of view forces the reader to stop and re-evaluate what he has just read. When did the narrator change? Who is the new narrator? What is happening?

The first of these questions is now easy to answer, due to the blank between paragraphs. A re-reading may also reveal subtle hints in the use of venir rather than ir, and traía rather than tenía or llevaba.

The answers to the other two questions are not so obvious, and are revealed slowly throughout the narration of the second part. "La información proporcionada por el pastor respecto al difunto sirve para precisar, en esta segunda parte del cuento, asuntos suscitados en la primera."<sup>1</sup>

A very different process is used in "El llano en llamas." In this story, the point of view is established almost immediately:

"¡Viva Petronilo Flores!"

El grito se vino rebotando por los paredones de la barranca y subió hasta donde estábamos nosotros. . . . (p. 66)

The author now proceeds to disguise the point of view throughout most of the rest of the narrative, using three basic elements.

The first of these is plural rather than singular number, which is used almost exclusively until the last part of the story (pp. 82-84). Because of its vagueness, the nosotros increases the aesthetic distance between the reader and the story. Having accomplished this necessary step from the start, Rulfo then uses many long passages

which make no references to the narrator himself, such as on p. 68 where he allows twenty-one lines to intervene between references to nosotros, always substituting such constructions as se oyó for oímos or se veía for veíamos. Finally, because of the strong emphasis in this story on external action,<sup>2</sup> the reader tends to concentrate on this aspect. Thus it is easy for him to be distracted from the true point of view.

Rulfo himself recognizes this distraction and resultant confusion in point of view when he allows the first-person narrator apparently to enter the minds of his companions:

"Se lo han de haber llevado - pensamos-  
Se lo han de haber llevado para enseñárselo al  
gobierno. . . ." (p. 71)

The question of true versus apparent point of view is especially visible in "Luvina." The story starts, as do many stories, with a description. Rulfo is "el narrador aparente de la historia."<sup>3</sup> The second paragraph continues the description, but it starts with an ellipsis which causes the reader some puzzlement. Shortly, however, we read: ". . . yo lo único que vi subir fue el viento. . . ." (p. 94). We now realize that what seemed to be authorial description was not that at all, but rather the voice of some character in the story. "En efecto, nadie escribe: alguien habla."<sup>4</sup>

Besides this narrator, there is also a third-person narrator who enters and exits. This narrator can hardly be called omniscient, since he seems to have access to very little information of the type one would expect from an omniscient narrator. His role is more analogous to that of the playwright: he provides stage directions. This

type of narrator is discussed later in this chapter.

"La herencia de Matilde Arcangel" starts with a similar illusion. We have what could typically be third-person narration, without even a hint that such is not the case. However, in the third paragraph we read: "Quien más lo aborrecía era su padre, por más cierto mi compadre, porque yo le bauticé al muchacho" (p. 57). The reader has again been misled by the author, and must now re-evaluate the relationship which he has started to organize in his mind, taking into account the new data which he has just received.

We will now examine the role of the omniscient narrator in Rulfo's stories. As Donald K. Gordon has pointed out, "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas" is the only story in which a third-person narrator is used exclusively.<sup>5</sup> However, the omniscience of the narrator in this story is subject to question. The story is written in the third person, but the omniscience of the narrator is impure. Already in this story, which Rulfo considers his first<sup>6</sup> (he published this one first, even though "Un pedazo de noche" was written several years earlier), the omniscient narrator has started a Rulfian metamorphosis, which is even more evident in some of his later stories.

The process which Robert Humphrey has called indirect interior monologue was used by Rulfo in this story, as well as in others. On the basis of his analysis of various modern novels, Humphrey describes the technique thus:

Indirect interior monologue is . . . that type of interior monologue in which an omniscient author presents unspoken material as if it were directly from



the consciousness of a character and . . . guides the reader through it. It differs from direct interior monologue basically in that the author intervenes between the character's psyche and the reader.

In practice, indirect interior monologue is usually combined with another of the techniques of stream of consciousness--especially with the description of consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

In "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas," the indirect interior monologue is not in fact mixed with other stream of consciousness techniques. It makes a fleeting appearance, but it is a beginning, and Rulfo uses the technique more extensively in other stories, especially in "¡Diles que no me maten!" The passage rather sneaks up on the reader, as Rulfo is narrating how the mother gets ready to go out, but then decides to return for a coat: "Entonces regresó por un abrigo ¿pues qué pasaría si él sintiera frío? Lo buscó entre las ropas de la cama . . . ." (p. 36).

There is another instance in the same story where the indirect interior monologue seems to be used but is not. This illusion is caused by the irregular punctuation of the passages which reveal conventional authorial description:

Acaso sufra, se decía. Acaso se esté ahogando ahí adentro, sin aire; o tal vez tenga miedo de la obscuridad. Todos los niños se asustan cuando están a oscuras. Todos. Y él también. ¿Por qué no se iba a asustar él? ¡Ah! si estuviera acá afuera, yo sabría defenderlo; o, al menos, vería si su carita se ponía pálida o si sus ojos se hacían tristes. Entonces yo sabría cómo hacer. Pero ahora, no; no donde él está. Ahí no. Eso se decía (pp. 35-36).

It can be seen from this passage that the proximity between this and true indirect interior monologue is great. Only a slight refinement of technique is needed to produce the process in its pure form.

The omniscient narrator in "El hombre" also exhibits a compromise. The narrator's description of the hombre's crime shows a confusion on the part of the omniscient narrator:

Y comenzó su tarea. Cuando llegó al tercero,  
le salían chorretes de lágrimas. O tal vez era  
sudor. (p. 39)

If the narrator cannot definitely distinguish, even though the reader expects him to have knowledge of this type of information, then the reader cannot help getting a feeling of uncertainty regarding the facts of the story.

Donald K. Gordon classifies "El hombre" as a story which moves on different but simultaneous planes.<sup>8</sup> In the first part one time level corresponds to the perceptions of the pursued, the other to the perceptions of the pursuer.<sup>9</sup> Although the author has organized Part I of the story omnisciently, the characters themselves reveal their own psychology,<sup>10</sup> as is typical of many of Rulfo's characters. Even though the role of the omniscient narrator is thus greatly reduced, he still has four important functions.

The first of these is that the omniscient narrator unites the different time levels, among which he does not differentiate. The result is that the reader then is easily misled regarding the sequence of events and who takes part in them.

Secondly, the omniscient narrator serves to describe the setting in which the story takes place, the most important element of which is the river. As will be seen in Chapter IV, rivers frequently accompany scenes of death in Rulfo.

Third, the omniscient narrator serves to identify the two characters and moves them spatially, a function which gradually is suppressed

as the story develops since, as the reader knows more about the two characters, he can identify them himself on the basis of content, and no longer needs to have the identification expressly made for him. It should be noted that as the role of the omniscient narrator contracts, the reader is forced into greater mental effort to keep from becoming confused.

Finally, the omniscient author presents to the reader an indirect interior monologue of the pursuer. It is very short and is presented in such a way that its intrusion is scarcely noticeable. It represents a transition from omniscient authorial narration, which preceded it, to the character's direct monologue, which follows it.

¿Por qué habría dicho aquello? Ahora su  
hijo se estaría burlando de él. O tal vez  
no . . . . (p. 41)

The monologue of the pursuer, which follows this indirect interior monologue, reveals important details of the story to the reader. In typical Rulfian manner, these details are revealed through the character himself, and the indirect interior monologue provides a means for the author to make the necessary transition from omniscient narration to character narration.

"En la madrugada" is likewise dominated by omniscient narration. The atmosphere of borrosidad and the multiple-focus techniques so well discussed by Rodríguez-Alcalá are functions of the omniscient narrator.<sup>11</sup>

An important aspect related to the third-person narration in this story is the limiting of omniscience which we have already seen in "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas." On p. 49 we read: "No se

sabe si las golondrinas vienen de Jiquilpan o salen de San Gabriel . . . ." Later, after the fight between Esteban and Justo Brambila, Esteban regains consciousness.

No se supo cómo abrió la puerta y se echó a la calle. No se supo cómo llegó a su casa . . . .  
(p. 52)

These passages, and especially the second one, aid in the creation of a feeling of uncertainty in the reader by blocking out basic facts.

Donald K. Gordon classifies "¡Diles que no me maten!" as a tri-modal narrative, in which monologue, dialogue, and authorial narration are mixed.<sup>12</sup> He notes "the author's psychological entry into Juvencio's mind" and states that "what Rulfo accomplishes is more than mere narrative description: it is as if Juvencio were himself describing in the third-person what had happened to him. The result is not the objectivity normally associated with third-person narration, but an intensification of Juvencio's own quandary wherein he seems in a dream."<sup>13</sup>

The process to which Gordon refers here is indistinguishable from Humphrey's indirect interior monologue, which is treated with "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas" and "El hombre." While it is true, as Gordon states, that Rulfo uses this technique successfully in "¡Diles que no me maten!," it needs to be noted that mixed with paragraphs where indirect interior monologue is used are paragraphs of conventional third-person omniscient narration. Owing to the similarity of such techniques, the change from one to the other is extremely subtle, resulting in more or less uncertainty on the reader's part, as to which process is taking place, and thus requiring greater

alertness on the part of the reader in order to be sure of what is going on. At times the reader feels that the story is ambiguous due to the difficulty of separating one process from the other.

As has previously been noted, the role of the omniscient narrator in "Luvina" is analogous to that of the playwright. This is, of course, a function of the long dialogue or semi-dialogue<sup>14</sup> which comprises most of the body of the story. He sets the stage, which is of extreme importance in this story of ambiente:<sup>15</sup>

Allá afuera seguía oyéndose el batallar del río. El rumor del aire. Los niños jugando. Parecía ser aún temprano, en la noche. (p. 97)

He also directs the characters about the stage;

. . . Eso hizo que el hombre se levantara, fuera hacia la puerta y les dijera. . . .  
Luego, dirigiéndose otra vez a la mesa, se sentó y dijo: . . . . (p. 96)

He does not tell the story. As frequently happens in Rulfo's stories, the characters themselves tell their own stories. The author makes quick appearances as narrator and then leaves.

The omniscient narrator has a much more prominent role in "La noche que lo dejaron solo." He is the nearly constant intermediary between reader and story, thus putting greater aesthetic distance between reader and character. In this way, the author is also able to narrate the actions of the protagonist while the latter is in a state of semi-consciousness. Both of these facts are significant in creating a feeling of borrosidad in the reader. Further, there is an absolute minimum of descriptive passages in this story; the narrator presents action almost exclusively. The preponderance of action with

no background against which it is taking place likewise creates in the reader a feeling of incompleteness, borrosidad, blur.

Indirect interior monologue has a small but important role in this story. Again, its appearance and disappearance are so subtle that it is scarcely noticeable, although the reader realizes that he is gradually being led into the mind of the character and then back out:

Había que "encumbrar, rodear la meseta  
y luego bajar." Eso estaba haciendo. Obre  
Dios. Estaba haciendo lo que le dijeron que  
hiciera, aunque no a las mismas horas. (p. 107)

The quotation marks surround the directions which were apparently previously discussed by his uncles. He is remembering them here. The point of most direct contact with the character's mind occurs with the obre Dios, after which the indirect interior monologue ceases.

The role of authorial omniscience is again reduced in "No oyes ladrar los perros," and the characters themselves move the story forward, at first through dialogue, and later through monologues. The author provides background, the most salient and permanent feature of which is the moon. He further moves the characters along their journey and tells what they are doing as they go. The shadowy atmosphere which accompanies this story can be clearly seen from the following passages:

Allí estaba la luna. Enfrente de ellos. Una  
grande y colorada que les llenaba de luz los  
ojos y que estiraba y oscurecía más su sombra  
sobre la tierra. (p. 115)

The role of the omniscient narrator in "Paso del Norte" is the smallest one of such roles in all the stories in which Rulfo makes

use of authorial narration. Nevertheless, the brief appearance of an omniscient narrator has an important role in the story. It occurs right at the start of Part II, and is a sudden change in mode, since Part I was a dialogue, and Part II immediately goes back to dialogue.

De los ranchos bajaba la gente a los pueblos;  
la gente de los pueblos se iba a las ciudades. En  
las ciudades la gente se perdía; se disolvía entre  
la gente. "¿No sabe ónde me darán trabajo?"  
"Sí, vete a Ciudad Juárez . . . ." (p. 122)

The entrance and exit of the omniscient narrator is so subtle that it almost goes undetected. The rest of the story is a dialogue, in which Rulfo imitates the local dialect of the campesinos. The omniscient narrator uses standard Spanish, otherwise he would be indistinguishable from the rest of the dialogue which starts again at the quotation marks.

The function of the omniscient narrator is to disorient the reader and make impossible the positive identification of characters in Part II. In Part I, character identification is no problem, since the whole of Part I is a dialogue with only two characters. The introduction of the omniscient narrator and la gente makes it impossible to know who the interlocutors are in the rest of Part II. The reader may assume that the son is one of them, but he cannot be sure. It could just as well be some of la gente referred to by the omniscient narrator. This confusion is continued when, in Part III, the son reveals that he made the trip north with his friend Estanislado, who is not previously mentioned.

All of the stories which involve third-person narration, with the exception of "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas," also involve switching from that to another point of view. Although no such change actually occurs in "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas," the use of indirect interior monologue is an attempt to alter the role of the omniscient narrator. In the others, changes occur from omniscience to character narration, often a monologue or a dialogue.

In "El hombre," the omniscient narrator of Part I gives way to a witness narrator in Part II. His narrative could be classed as monologue but it must be noted that it is a monologue which is actually half of a dialogue, that is, a semi-dialogue. (See note 17.) This fact is not evident at first, but when the narrator says, "Pero no soy adivino, señor licenciado" (p. 44) we see from the direct address that we are receiving only one part of the conversation, as Gordon notes:

La técnica de Rulfo aquí es magnífica. El pastor habla sin interrupción, y sin embargo, a través de sus palabras nos hace sentir la presencia del licenciado, y comprender su papel conversacional. "¿Dice usted que mató a todita la familia de los Urquidi?" (45), "¿Y dice usted que me va a meter en la cárcel por esconder a ese individuo?" La primera nos da a conocer el nombre del perseguidor--de un modo tan incidental como llegamos a conocer el nombre del hombre (41), y la segunda subraya la injusticia a que pueden quedar sujetos los humildes pobres.<sup>16</sup>

The witness narrator serves two functions. First, he permits the reader to see the hombre in a different light. In Part I, the omniscient narrator concentrated on presenting the characters only in their relation to one another and to the crime which was committed. In Part II the hombre is seen in a more human light: "El sólo me pedía de comer y me platicaba de sus muchachos, chorreando lágrimas"(p. 46).



This is a result of the fact that the new narrator knows nothing of the man's background, and thus does not judge him, but rather takes pity on him.

Secondly, the witness narrator provides a means of telling the outcome of the hunt in Part I, which is more in keeping with the Rulfian technique. The narrator tells the licenciado that he found the man face-down in the river with "la nuca repleta de agujeros" (p. 47). In this way the reader comes to realize the outcome of the hunt, because earlier in the story the pursuer has threatened to shoot the hunted in the neck. It is typical of Rulfo that he omits actual events such as this, preferring to allude to them.<sup>17</sup> Also, events of the story are usually presented through the characters, rather than directly by the author, but to do so coherently in Part I would have been difficult, due to the hallucinatory state in which the characters are found.<sup>18</sup>

The unexpected change of the point of view from Part I to Part II forces the reader into careful evaluation of all the information he receives in Part II, and to relate it carefully with the facts he has received in Part I in order to establish in his mind the relationship between the two. Also, the fact that the new narrator is an entirely new character, unrelated in any way with the ones previously introduced, tends to add to the feeling of disorientation in the reader. This is especially important as the new narrator gives out information which was withheld in Part I, such as the name of the family which was assassinated. The high point of this part, after which there can remain no doubt that the narration deals with the hombre, is the passage mentioned above in which the shepherd tells how the man in the river died.

Narrator changes in "En la madrugada" are constant. Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá describes the situation in this way:

El cuento tiene dos narradores: el escritor y el protagonista. El primero se coloca en diferentes lugares para contarnos los episodios diversos: frente al paisaje de San Gabriel, en el corral de Brambila, en la pieza de Margarita, en el rancho de Esteban. El segundo recuerda desde la cárcel en soliloquios que se interrumpen por la intervención del otro narrador.<sup>19</sup>

The first such change occurs between Parts II and III. Rulfo spends the first two parts setting the stage and introducing Esteban and his cows. The reader may now logically expect the next step to be the start of the action. What he finds, however, is a monologue of a nameless character, who he soon realizes is Esteban.

Although the narrator has changed, the thread of the narrative remains intact. Esteban continues the narration as a memory, which therefore means that the perspective from which the narrator views the story has changed. The omniscient narrator narrated the story as it unfolded; from Esteban's point of view, it is over, and he is narrating accomplished facts. In the middle of Part III (p. 50) the omniscient narrator again takes over, and the reader is jolted back to the original conditions under which the story was being told.

Between Parts III and IV (p. 50) a change back to Esteban as narrator again takes place, forcing the reader into a certain mental alertness in order to follow what is taking place, due to the change in the perspective from which the action is viewed.

The transition from Part III to Part IV is especially interesting:

. . . Y le dio de patadas cuando vio que mamaba de las cuatro tetas. "Te romperé las jetas, hijo de res."

"Y le hubiera roto el hocico si no hubiera  
surgido por allí el patrón don Justo. . . ."  
(p. 50)

At the end of Part III, we hear Esteban's voice, but within the framework of omniscient narration. Part IV starts immediately at that point, and again with Esteban's voice, but now the omniscient frame is gone and the perspective from which the action is viewed has changed.

It can be stated unequivocally that Esteban's first monologue is a true monologue, since there is no indication of any other person being involved. In his second speech, however, Rulfo again uses the process used in the second part of "El hombre": he indicates the presence of an interlocutor who never actually participates actively in the story:

"¿Que pasó luego? Yo no lo supe. No volví  
a trabajar con él. Ni yo ni nadie, porque ese  
mismo día se murió. No lo sabía usted? . . . ."  
(p. 50)

As Part V starts, and the omniscient author again takes over the narration, the reader sees that the progression of the narrative has been broken and time jumps backward. The events which have just been narrated are now re-told from a different angle, a technique which Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá calls "la técnica de enfoques repetidos."<sup>20</sup> The omniscient narrator moves the story forward in sequence from the starting point until Part VII, where a semi-dialogue, with Esteban speaking, takes over.

Rather than continue the narration from the end of Part VI from a different perspective, Esteban reviews and comments upon the events of the story, whose development ended at the end of Part V. The use

of the monologues or semi-dialogues of Esteban, and especially the last two (in which he mentions that he is in jail) is the means by which Rulfo extends the time element of the story to undefined length, although such does not seem to be the case.<sup>21</sup> This aspect of "En la madrugada" will be discussed in Chapter III.

"¡Diles que no me maten!" is a story which starts without a narrator, as a dialogue between a father and his son. Toward the end of the dialogue an omniscient narrator appears, but his function is similar to that of the omniscient narrator in "Luvina;" he simply gives what amount to stage directions for the characters, moving them about but doing little more than that.

Part II (p. 86) starts with an omniscient narrator who now has an important role, already discussed. He provides indirect interior monologue. As Part III ends (p. 87), the indirect interior monologue also ends, and the omniscient narrator reverts back to the role of playwright, simply directing the dialogue between don Lupe and Juvencio.

Juvencio Nava starts the narration of Part III, following the process used in a similar situation in "En la madrugada" (p. 50). At the end of Part II we hear Juvencio's voice, directed by an omniscient author. Then Juvencio takes up Part III, the omniscient author having disappeared, and continues the events of the narrative in sequence. He narrates looking back at the events, rather than as they happen.

Ahí se lo haiga si me los mata.

"Y me mató un novillo." (p. 87)

The problem of identifying whose monologue this is, is solved by the smooth transition here. The identification is actually made by the omniscient narrator of Part II. The problem which this passage does present is that of determining when Juvencio says it, in order to determine the perspective from which he is viewing the action, and to determine how this passage fits into the one which immediately follows it.

After careful analysis, it would appear that the monologue and the indirect interior monologue which follows it are made in sequence, since there is no break or other device used to indicate a separation. It is not possible to determine to whom he delivers this monologue, nor is it necessary. The monologue's purpose is to inform the reader of Juvencio's life up to the present. It represents a break in the chronological order of events, although this fact is not clear, because the time when he speaks the monologue is not fixed until two pages after it begins, where we read:

Caminó entre aquellos hombres en silencio,  
con los brazos caídos. (p. 89)

Thus the monologue and the interior direct monologue take place while Juvencio is walking with his captors to meet the colonel. By using direct monologue to start the time sequence and switching later to third-person narration, Rulfo is able to attenuate the author's part, which would, if there, make it easier to establish the sequence than is the case by postponing authorial narration.

In Part IV, the omniscient narrator assumes a new role. This part contains mostly dialogue, with the narrator interrupting occasionally as guide. Into this guidance, Rulfo skillfully weaves terms of distance which are not usually associated with third-person omniscient

narration, thus making the reader feel that he is an on-the-scene witness to the action: "Desde acá, desde afuera, se oyó bien claro cuanto dijo" (p. 92). Normally the desde acá, would come from a character-narrator placing himself in a position of proximity to the dialogue. However, since here we have an omniscient narrator, the effect is to pull the reader into the story and make him seem a witness.

This illusion is continued into Part V, where the omniscient narrator has a larger role than that of simply dialogue guider:

Ahora, por fin, se había apaciguado.  
Estaba allí arrinconado al pie del horcón. Había  
venido su hijo Justino y su hijo Justina se  
había ido y había vuelto y ahora otra vez  
venía. (p.93)

Here, as we have seen before, Rulfo avoids narrating the actual terrible deeds as they happen. Rather, he refers to Juvencio's assassination after the fact.

Of the stories which are simple monologues, there are several types. Some involve an audience, at least an implied audience, others do not. Of the latter type, "Macario" is an outstanding example.

Macario has no listeners to his monologues, except of course the reader. This is easily accepted due to Macario's nature: he is a mental deficient, so one does not expect him to act normally. The fact that he sits alone and talks to no one, perhaps not even himself, does not seem in the least strange, once the reader realizes his mental deficiency. Further, he is not really narrating an event, or series of events. He is, in a way, narrating his whole life, which the reader must piece together. His is simply a rambling conversation

with himself, whose purpose is to keep him awake so he can kill frogs and thus not incur the wrath of his stepmother.

"Nos han dado la tierra" presents a very different type of monologue. Here a character-narrator narrates a trek of four men across the barren plain, and their meeting with the government representative. The uniqueness of the story springs from the use of the present tense as a base from which to narrate the action. There is no listener mentioned or implied. The use of the present tense produces a strange sensation in the reader, because the narrator-protagonist narrates the events as they unfold, as if he were an omniscient narrator viewing the story from without, rather than a participant in the action. The effect is almost as if one were reading a diary written in the historical present or a filmed travelogue, rather than a short story.

"La Cuesta de las Comadres" and "Talpa" present another type of monologue. They are told as a recollection, using past tenses (preterite and imperfect, especially) as a starting point for the narration. Thus the events are narrated as being over with, in a way more typical of monologic narration. What is a puzzlement to the reader is the question of who the listener is. None is mentioned, nor is any suggested, which leaves only the reader as listener. This fact in turn raises the question in "La Cuesta de las Comadres," of why the narrator would invite someone unknown (the reader) into his home ("Antes, sentado donde ahora estoy, se veía claramente Zapotlán." (p. 23) to tell him of such a heinous deed, one which would seem better kept secret.

In "Talpa," the reader gets the feeling that the narrator speaks

compulsively, as if talking about the crime committed will help take away the remorse. Nevertheless, the question of who is the listener adds an element of mystery to the story, which is not fully explained by Carlos Blanco Aguinaga's statement that Rulfo's characters are ensimismados and talk just to themselves.<sup>22</sup> If such were the case, one would expect a monologue of less coherence, clarity and length. As always in Rulfo, such things cannot be known, nor are they meant to be known.

A hybrid of the above two methods is to be found in the next story, "Es que somos muy pobres." The participant-narrator puts a present-tense frame around the events of the story, which are themselves narrated as memories, over and done with. The present-tense narration, at the end, elicits from the reader the same strange feeling which he gets in "Nos han dado la tierra":

Y Tacha llora al sentir que su vaca ro  
volverá porque se la ha matado el río. Está  
aquí, a mi lado, con su vestido color de rosa,  
mirando el río desde la barraca . . . Por  
su cara corren chorretes de agua sucia . . . .

Yo la abrazo tratando de consolarla,  
pero ella no entiende. Lloro con más ganas . . . .  
(p. 35)

"El llano en llamas" is a monologue in disguise, mostly due to its extension and its emphasis on external action. The disguise helps the reader to accept the detailed descriptions of events of the first part of the story, which are separated from the end of the story by at least eight years. If it were not for the techniques Rulfo employs in disguising the narrative point of view, the reader likely would



find it difficult to believe that events of so long ago could be retold with such seeming precision.

"Acuérdate" is a monologue with a listener implied by the direct address. We do not feel the presence of the listener as strongly in this story as in "Luvina" or in "El hombre" (Part II), but we do know that he is an old friend of the narrator: "Tú te debes acordar de él, pues fuimos compañeros de escuela y lo conociste como yo" (p. 113). We can also assume that both narrator and listener are fairly old: "Sólo que te falte mucho la memoria, no te has de acordar de eso" (p. 112).

Donald K. Gordon calls "Anacleto Morones" a monologue with dialogue recalled by the narrator.<sup>23</sup> It is a curious type of monologue in which the narrator, Lucas Lucatero, frequently cedes his position as narrator, to become interlocutor in a dialogue with one of the ten women who have come to visit him. He speaks with them one at a time, always introducing them when he changes from one to the other. Sometimes he, as narrator, manipulates the dialogue:

--No, gracias-dijeron. No veníamos a molestarte. . . . (p. 128)

Other times he simply lets the dialogue run without his interference as narrator:

-¿Y qué buscan por aquí?  
-Venimos a verte.  
-Ya me vieron. Estoy bien.  
-Te has venido muy lejos. . . . (p. 129)

Other times we get his thoughts directly: "¡Viejas carambas! Haberlo dicho antes" (p. 134).

The effect of all this is to produce a strange type of monologue which at times seems not monologue, but dialogue. The reader moves in and out of Lucas Lucatero's mind according to the latter's posture with respect to the story. When he is acting as narrator, he interposes himself between the reader and the action, but when he is a dialoguer, the presence of a narrator is not noticed.

"Un cuento" is another monologue which makes heavy use of dialogue within the monologic framework. The long dialogues which move along autonomously (i.e. without constant narrator guidance) on p. 105 and p. 107, in which the first-person narrator is seen not as narrator but as interlocutor, tend to attenuate the effect of monologue.

Unlike many of Rulfo's monologues, "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel" is a monologue directed to some specific listeners. In this sense it bears greater resemblance to the monologues in "Luvina" than that of Part II of "El hombre" or "Paso del Norte." This is because the listeners are just that; they are not interlocutors whose half of the conversation is suppressed, but whose presence is nevertheless felt.

The first hint that there is an audience to this story comes on p. 57: "Era un hombrón así de grande . . . ." This suggests that the narrator makes a gesture, for the benefit of an audience, to show them the size of someone. This is reinforced on p. 58: "Ojalá que ninguno de los presentes se ofenda por si es de allá; pero yo sostengo mi juicio." Nevertheless, the reader never gets any

other details about this audience, which he knows to be present.

"Un pedazo de noche" is another monologue which shares certain characteristics with "Anacleto Morones," in the long, autonomous dialogues in which the narrator does not make her presence felt.<sup>24</sup> This tends to make the story appear not simply a monologue.

A very different process is used on p. 12 of "Un pedazo de noche" to alter the effect of monologue. The narrator is giving Claudio Marcos' long monologue on his being a grave digger. In the middle of it, she intercalates her own thoughts; then she gives the rest of his monologue: ". . . No, no me dan pena los muertos, y mucho menos los vivos" (p. 12). Because this second section of his speech starts with leaders, the reader gets the feeling that it has been going on while she is giving her thoughts. Since she is the narrator, this is not possible, and the normal process of monologic narration is thereby transformed to disorient the reader.

At one point, the reader gets the feeling that the story is being told to someone, using a process similar to that of the second part of "El hombre:"

. . . El se llamaba Claudio Marcos. No, el niño no era suyo. Era de un compadre. Nomás que él se había a-comedido a cuidarlo porque hoy la estaba celebrando. Bueno, todos los días se las colocaba, pero nunca se había puesto tan necio como ahora. (p. 9)

The interlocutor whose presence is apparent here is not mentioned again.

Dialogue is sometimes an important ingredient in Rulfo's stories. These dialogues are basically of two types: those in which there is

a narrator who interposes himself between the dialogue and the reader, and those in which the dialogue goes directly to the reader without the guidance of a narrator, either omniscient or otherwise.

"Paso del Norte" is almost a pure dialogue. The one-line role of the omniscient narrator in this story has previously been discussed. We will now examine the element of dialogue.

In the first and last parts of the story we have a dialogue between father and son. We know this because in each case, in the first line of the dialogue, the first speaker addresses the other as padre. The father has a part which is somewhat unusual for an interlocutor in a Rulfian dialogue: he is used to develop the action of the story by asking his son a series of questions which extract vital information from the son.

The reader may become confused in Parts II and III due to the son's switching from one unidentified interlocutor to another and then back again to the first one. This feeling is enhanced by contrast with Parts I and IV, where identification of the interlocutors is automatic. The part which the omniscient narrator plays in this has been previously discussed. A further enhancement of this disoriented feeling comes in Part III where there again appears a dialogue which is partially suppressed:

-Está bien. Te voy a dar un papelito pa nuestro amigo de Ciudad Juárez. No lo pierdas. El te pasará la frontera y de ventaja llevas hasta la contrata. Aquí va el domicilio y el teléfono pa que lo localices más pronto. No, no vas a ir a Texas. ¿Has oído hablar de Oregon? Bien, dile a él que quieres ir a Oregon. A cosechar manzanas, eso es, nada de algodones. Se ve que tú eres un hombre listo. Allá te presentas con Fernández. ¿No lo conoces? Bueno, preguntas por él. (p. 123)

"El día del derrumbe" is a dialogue which at times gives the appearance of being more of a monologue. There are two interlocutors involved in this story, but once the introductory part of the story is over, one narrates long passages at a time, with the other just listening and making very short comments.

The purpose of the interlocutor Melitón is not to extract information from the other interlocutor, as in "Paso del Norte," but rather to reinforce it. By thus establishing Melitón as an authority early in the story,<sup>25</sup> the reader is able to accept Melitón's quotation of the governor's speech without question (p. 3); otherwise one might doubt and think that he had made up parts of it, thus reducing the effect of grotesqueness which strongly comes through the story.

The puzzling effect of the end of the story, where Melitón's authority is destroyed, will be discussed in Chapter IV. It is simply mentioned here as the main factor in creation of ambiguity in this story.

Donald K. Gordon's classification of "No oyes ladrar los perros" as a story told through dialogue is based on the fact that dialogue plays a more important part in the unfolding of the narrative than does the authorial narration. This great preponderance of dialogue, which goes directly to the reader without a narrator imposing himself between story and reader, means that the aesthetic distance between the two is lessened. One might expect, then, that when the omniscient author takes over to narrate, this aesthetic distance would automatically increase. Such is not the case, however, for Rulfo narrates

in such a way that what is third-person narration seems to be something else. As the father carries his wounded son on his back through the desert night, an omniscient narrator describes the scene. This narrator's use of allá arriba and acá abajo makes it appear that he is actually a participant in the action.

El otro iba allá arriba, todo iluminado  
por la luna, con su cara descolorida, sin sangre,  
reflejando una luz opaca. Y él acá abajo. (p. 115)

By thus equalizing this distance, the story is integrated into a homogeneous narrative, without the differences which might be expected from the combining of modes. The subtlety of the technique momentarily impedes the determination of the actual narrator.

We have seen in this chapter how the various ways in which Rulfo uses the point of view of the narrator lead to the feeling that things are not as they seem to be. The reader feels that his apprehension of point of view is frequently illusory, thus generating in the reader a certain insecurity about whether or not his understanding of the story is the correct one.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista," p. 203.
- <sup>2</sup>Idem, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," pp. 86-87.
- <sup>3</sup>Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, p. 62.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," pp. 14-16.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>7</sup>Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 29-30.
- <sup>8</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista," p. 200.
- <sup>9</sup>Harss and Dohmann, p. 261.
- <sup>10</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista," p. 200.
- <sup>11</sup>Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, pp. 19-23.
- <sup>12</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 128.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 199.
- <sup>14</sup>The term semi-dialogue is used because of the fact that the interlocutor never speaks or has any other intervention in the story, although he is a character in his own right, about whom we have certain knowledge (e.g. he is going to Luvina, he has beer which he does not drink, etc.).
- <sup>15</sup>Classification of Luis Leal.
- <sup>16</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista," p. 203.
- <sup>17</sup>Mariana Frenk, "Pedro Páramo," Universidad de México, 15, No. 11 (July, 1960), 21.
- <sup>18</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista," p. 201.
- <sup>19</sup>Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, pp. 17-18.

<sup>20</sup>Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, pp. 19-23.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 23.

<sup>22</sup>Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 126.

<sup>24</sup>It is interesting to note the use of a female narrator and urban setting in this story. Both are unique in the works of Rulfo, although it should be remembered that his first novel, which he later destroyed, had an urban setting.

<sup>25</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," pp. 183-184.



## CHAPTER III

### THE TIME ELEMENT

We will now examine the time element in Rulfo's stories. It will be shown that his time techniques result in the creation of a world in which the reader is kept in a continuous state of disorientation.

The question of time is one which has disturbed men over the ages. Time may have different meanings for the scientist, the mathematician, the philosopher, the poet. In literature, time can be used in many different ways, a fact which has become more evident in this century, as authors' experiments with time in their works have taken on more and more importance.

Time is always important in Rulfo's stories. He uses it in varying ways, sometimes slowing its passage, sometimes accelerating its passage, often suspending it, denying it, always in a manner which helps in maintaining reader confusion. For purposes of this study, we can discern three general categories of time in Rulfo's stories, and we will start our study with the category in which there are the fewest stories, that in which time flows at different speeds. We shall then consider the category with the most stories, those in which there is a partial stopping of time. There are two types of story in this group: those in which the time element is considered on dual levels, and those in which it is considered on a single level. Finally, we shall examine the stories which are atemporal, the

manifestation which is commonly but erroneously believed to be most typical of Rulfo's stories.

In 1955 Carlos Blanco Aguinaga made the first attempt to analyze the time element in El llano en llamas.<sup>1</sup> However, the fact that he tried to apply the same norms to all of the stories results in a misapprehension of the use which Rulfo makes of time and fails to recognize the special effects achieved in some of them. Edmundo Valadés also speaks of nonexistent time in El llano en llamas, but the examples which he uses to support this theory do not come from a representative group of stories.<sup>2</sup>

Ramón Xirau's statement on time in Rulfo is probably the most perceptive, but unfortunately he does not enter into details:

La negación del tiempo que, al transformarse en pasado, se vuelve cosa, es tan sólo parcial in los cuentos de El llano en llamas. Entre los quince cuentos que componen el libro, "Luvina" se acerca, más que ningún otro, a la negación total del tiempo. . . . En esta negación total de los tiempos, "Luvina" es el antecedente directo de la espléndida novela que es Pédro Páramo.<sup>3</sup>

The denial of time in "Luvina" is again mentioned by Luis Leal, who makes reference to Carlos Blanco Aguinaga's original article on the subject,<sup>4</sup> and by José de la Colina who, perhaps inadvertently, says much the same as Blanco Aguinaga without mentioning the latter's work.<sup>5</sup> Other than these articles, the only studies of time in Rulfo's stories are brief references found in other, general studies, which will be mentioned as necessary in the development of the present work.

We will now see how Rulfo causes time to flow at different speeds in three of his stories. The first of these is "El llano en

llamas." One might expect that dual time levels would predominate in this story, due to the fact that it is a monologue. As we will see later, stories in which the narrator is within the story are frequently told on dual levels. Such is not the case, however. It must be kept in mind that, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, Rulfo effectively combines various devices to disguise the fact that this is a monologue. Since the reader seldom feels the monologic aspect of the story, he also does not feel dual time levels.

We have already noted the importance of the story's external action in the preceding chapter. We can now add that the rate of time passage in the story depends upon how much action is described, and how it is described. In the following passage, in which the dominant tense is the preterite, time seems to move rapidly:

Nos dimos vuelta y los miramos por la  
mira de las troneras.

Pasaron los primeros, luego los segundos  
y otros más, con el cuerpo echado para adelante,  
jorobados de sueño. Les relumbraba la cara de  
sudor, como si la hubiera zambullido en el agua  
al pasar por el arroyo.

Siguieron pasando.

Llegó la señal. Se oyó un chiflido largo  
y comenzó la tracatera allá lejos, por donde  
se había ido La Perra. Luego siguió aquí.

Fue fácil. Casi tapaban el agujero de las  
troneras con su bulto, de modo que aquello era  
como tirarles a boca de jarro y hacerles pegar  
tamaño respingo de la vida a la muerte sin que  
apenas se dieran cuenta.

Pero esto duró muy poquito. . . . (p. 68)

The effect is reinforced through the predomination of short, choppy sentences, the short paragraphs, and finally the statement "pero esto duró muy poquito."

After the skirmish, the protagonist's band of men is routed, and they run to a safe hiding place. Here the action gives way to a

definite lack of action, and time seems to pass much more slowly:

Nos quedábamos agazapados detrás de unas piedras grandes y boludas, todavía resollando fuerte por la carrera. Solamente mirábamos a Pedro Zamora preguntándole con los ojos qué era lo que nos había pasado. Pero él también nos miraba sin decirnos nada . . . .

Pedro Zamora nos seguía mirando. Estaba haciendo sus cuentas con los ojos; con aquellos ojos que él tenía . . . . Nos contaba de uno en uno. Sabía ya cuantos éramos los que estábamos allí, pero parecía no estar seguro todavía; por eso nos repasaba una vez y otra y otra. (p. 69)

The use of relatively long sentences and paragraphs, and the relatively static state of the scene combine to make it appear that time is now going forward more slowly. The dominant tense is now the imperfect. Time has not stopped entirely, however, because we see Pedro Zamora in a temporal series: he counts once, then again, and again.

Time jumps are used in the story. They are always ahead, into the future. Thus the chronology is not broken:

Había vuelto la paz al Llano Grande.

Pero no por mucho tiempo.

Hacía cosa de ocho meses que estábamos escondidos en el escondrijo del cañón del Tozín . . . .  
(p. 72)

It is impossible to determine precisely how much time transpires in this story. The narrator tells us, toward the end of the story, "con Pedro Zamora anduve cosa de cinco años" (p. 82). However, we have no way of knowing what part of the five years is represented by this story. He also tells us, "yo salí de la cárcel hace tres años" (p. 83). Since we do not know how much time he spent in jail, we have a further barrier to the determination of exactly how much time passes in the story. Nevertheless, it can be safely stated that this is the story in which the greatest amount of time passes in chronological order.

In "Paso del Norte" we also see time moving at different speeds, due in part to the use of dialogue in contrast with other modes of narration.

In Part I, in the dialogue between father and son, time moves along slowly as they converse. However, as Part II starts and the narrator changes, time seems to move faster. This happens when a mass of people is involved, rather than individuals, and when the action is narrated with a minimum of details:

De los ranchos bajaba la gente a los pueblos;  
la gente de los pueblos se iba a las ciudades. En  
las ciudades la gente se perdía, se disolvía entre  
la gente. (p. 122)

When dialogue then ensues, time again slows down.

In Part III there is a time period which must have been skipped by the author. We already know that the character involved needs two hundred pesos in order to be taken to the United States. On p. 123 we read:

Y sí, bajamos mercancía de los trenes de  
la mañana a la noche y todavía nos sobró tarea  
pa otro día. Nos pagaron. Yo conté el dinero:  
Sesenta y cuatro pesos. Si todos los días  
fueran así.

-Señor, aquí le traigo los doscientos pesos.

The actual time involved here cannot be determined. From the way in which these paragraphs fit together, the reader gets the impression that the second dialogue follows immediately, which cannot be possible.

Between Part III and the last part of the story, there is another jump, covering the time between the departure for the United States and the return home after surviving the attack at the river crossing. In the last part, father and son again are in a dialogue. By means of a flashback, the son tells the father the story, thus filling in the

space of time which had been jumped. Then the father fills in for the son the main event which took place during his absence: his wife has run away with a muleteer. However, he does not use flashback to tell this.

The reader feels time passing at different speeds in "Anacleto Morones," a process which is controlled by the passing in and out of the narrator's mind. This process has already been discussed in the previous chapter. In the long, boring dialogues, time passes slowly. The narrator himself confesses to us his purpose in doing this:

La cosa, pues, estaba en hacerles larga la plática, hasta que se les hiciera de noche, quitándoles la idea que les bullía en la cabeza.  
(p. 131)

He manages to achieve this end. When the women arrive, it is shortly after lunch time, since the sun is high in the sky, and so he offers them food, which they refuse, saying they have just eaten (pp. 127, 128, 130). Later we are told: "eran las tres de la tarde" (p. 136). Finally they all leave except one, whom he invites to spend the night with him. She accepts, and the time then jumps to early the next morning (p. 143).

It is in the interior time level where time apparently passes faster, due to the narrator's giving a summation of events:

Y me fui otra vez al corral, a cortar arrayanes.  
Y allí me entretuve lo más que pude, mientras se le bajaba el mal humor a la mujer aquella.  
Cuando regresé, ya se había ido. (p. 132)

The amount of time which has passed is more, in this short passage, than that which passes in some of the longer passages.

The rather large group of stories in which time is partially stopped are basically of two types: those in which we can discern two levels of time, and in which time does not flow on one of the levels, and those which have only one level of time, on which it sometimes flows and sometimes does not.

The first story in which dual time levels are significant is "Macario." In the time level which we could call objective or exterior, time flows. Macario is aware of this flow. He starts the story by saying "Estoy sentado junto a la alcantarilla aguardando a que salgan las ranas" (p. 9). He is aware of waiting; therefore the passage of time must have meaning for him. Near the end of the story he says "ahora estoy junto a la alcantarilla esperando a que salgan las ranas. Y no ha salido ninguna en todo este rato que llevo platicando" (p. 14). From this last statement, we see that he feels time flowing.

Time does not stop on this level. The last sentence of the story ends not with a period, but with leaders, thus suggesting the continuation of Macario's chattering:

De lo que más ganas tengo es de volver a probar  
algunos tragos de la leche de Felipa, aquella leche  
buena y dulce como la miel que le sale por debajo  
a las flores del obelisco. . . . (p. 14)

While Macario is seated at the sewer, a second, psychological (or interior) time level comes into play. Time does not flow on this level; there is no meaningful temporal series which we could construct by which time could be measured.<sup>6</sup> The events which he describes take place at indefinite times: "Ahora ya hace mucho tiempo que no me da a chupar . . . ." (p. 10); "Un día inventaron que yo andaba ahorcando

a alguien . . . ." (p. 10); "Felipa antes iba todas las noches al cuarto . . . ." (p. 10); "Dicen en la calle que yo estoy loco . . . yo no lo he oído" (p. 10). None of these events can be assigned a definite order with respect to each other, or with respect to any other event. They simply occurred, some of them perhaps once, others possibly many times. Time in this level does not pass for Macario, and he talks about events as they come to his mind, part of one suggesting something else, with no time sequence:

Y uno da topes contra el suelo; primero despacito, después más recio y aquello suena como un tambor. Igual que el tambor que anda con la chirimía, cuando viene la chirimía a la función del Señor. Y entonces, uno está en la iglesia, amarrado a la madrina, oyendo afuera el tum tum del tambor. (p. 12)

Carlos Blanco Aguinaga finds that time is in suspension in "Talpa," and gives the following analysis:

Más insistente aún que en los demás cuentos es aquí el laconismo repetitivo y monótono del que narra la historia. Más aún que en "Luvina," el monólogo, con su repetición de frases, e ideas, con su recoger al final de los párrafos lo dicho al principio, parece haber estancado para siempre los hechos exteriores en la meditación interior del personaje.<sup>7</sup>

He also notes that in this story "ahora y antes parecen ya ser el mismo instante," and that "entre el principio y el final del párrafo no ha pasado el tiempo."<sup>8</sup>

Donald K. Gordon feels that the constant repetition and freezing of time are tied to the theme of remorse, which dominates the story. He divides the story in five parts, emphasizing the tense which dominates each section, an analysis which does not seem to lead to any



particular conclusion. He also sees the constant present-past switching as placing different conceptual values on ahora and entonces, and also as being a result of the frequent repetition of ideas.<sup>9</sup>

In the following passage, which Blanco Aguinaga uses as an example of Rulfo's technique for stopping time,<sup>10</sup> it must be recognized that this suspension depends in part upon a realization of the fact that the "ahora" of the passage is not an immediate "ahora" for the narrator, but rather one which the narrator recalls from the second, exterior time level:

Algún día llegará la noche. En eso pensábamos.  
Llegará la noche y nos pondremos a descansar.  
Ahora se trata de cruzar el día, de atravesarlo  
como sea para correr del calor y del sol.  
Después nos detendremos. Después. Lo que  
tenemos que hacer por lo pronto es esfuerzo  
tras esfuerzo para ir de prisa detrás de tantos  
como nosotros y delante de otros muchos. De  
eso se trata. Ya descansaremos bien a bien cuando  
estemos muertos.

En eso pensábamos Natalia y yo. . . .  
(pp. 60-61)

In addition to these comments, it would seem that another process, also seen for example in "La cuesta de las comadres" or "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel," is a factor in the portrayal of time. This is the fact that Part I contains the two basic elements of the story, the remorse and the murder of Tanilo Santos. With these facts given out, the reader must not expect a traditional time progression to a climax, but rather must expect to look for a more personal, Rulfian depiction of time.

The second, exterior level of time complements the interior level already explained. This level is typically tied to the first person narrator, and is not readily visible until well into Part II of the

story where it is constantly felt through the use of such phrases as "yo sé ahora que Natalia está arrepentida de lo que pasó," or "me acuerdo muy bien de esas noches" (p. 57). This level is again very apparent in the last section of the story: "Ahora estamos los dos en Zenzontla" (p. 64). It has been somewhat elusive up to this point, but now the whole last section is narrated with the present tense dominating.

In "Es que somos muy pobres," the objective time level serves as a frame around the events of the story which is told on an interior level. It starts "aquí todo va de mal en peor" (p. 31), and ends with the narrator trying to console his sister and at the same time contemplating her future. "Yo la abrazo tratando de consolarla . . . ." (p. 35). Within this frame, the narrator gives us the disastrous events of the past week, and especially of the last three days. There is a frequent interplay of the two levels, which are united through the mind of the narrator: "No acabo de saber por qué se le ocurriría a la Serpentina pasar el río este, cuando sabía que no era el mismo río que ella conocía de a diario" (pp. 32-33).

On the psychological time level, time both flows and is suspended. Both of these conditions are under the control of the narrator. Time flow is measured by sequences of catastrophes:

La semana pasada se me murió mi tía Jacinta, y el sábado, cuando ya la habíamos enterrado y comenzaba a bajársenos la tristeza, comenzó a llover como nunca.  
(p. 31)

There are four such sequences, not necessarily in chronological order with respect to one another. The first one is the first

paragraph of the story, part of which is reproduced above. The second one deals with the flood and discovery that the cow la Serpentina had been carried off, from p. 31, paragraph two, until the end of the second paragraph on p. 32.

The third sequence is the narrator's mental reconstruction of the events of the cow's drowning, from the last paragraph of p. 32 to the second paragraph of p. 33. The final catastrophic sequence deals with the falling of the other daughters into prostitution, from the last paragraph on p. 33 to the second paragraph on p. 34.

In the last two series, the intervention of the objective time level is greater and greater, thus resulting in a tendency toward less time flow. After the final sequence of tragedies, the flow is suspended as the narrator stops narrating sequences of events, which would provide the means by which to feel a movement of time, and starts philosophizing:

Mi mamá no sabe por qué Dios la ha castigado tanto al darle unas hijas de ese modo, cuando en su familia, desde mi abuelo para acá, nunca ha habido gente mala. (p. 35)

In the narration of events in the second series of catastrophies, regarding the rising water and flood, there is a curious time jump which is very subtle. The river started growing "hace tres noches, a eso de la madrugada" (p. 31). By the time the narrator left the house, "el río ya había perdido sus orillas" (pp. 31-32). He and his sister went back in the afternoon to watch the spectacle and then went up the cliff for a better look. "Allí fue donde supimos que el río se había llevado a la Serpentina, la vaca esa que era de mi hermana Tacha . . . ." (p. 32). It would be natural to assume that, although the

narrator does not say so, it was at this time and place that they got the bad news. However, since we already have been told that " . . . apenas ayer . . . . supimos que la vaca que mi papa le regaló para el día de su santo se la había llevado el río" (p. 31), there is a day unaccounted for. Since the mentioned visit to the cliff took place the first day, and the revelation of the cow's loss came ayer, these could not have coincided, as we are led to believe by the statement that "allí fue donde supimos que el río se había llevado a la Serpentina . . . ." (p. 32).

As the sequential narration ends and the philosophizing begins, the present tense dominates. This allows the narrator, at the very end, to slip into the immediate present (and objective time level), thus completing the frame around the story.

Donald K. Gordon believes there are three time levels in "Nos han dado la tierra," which he describes thus: the first level corresponds to the episode with the government delegate, the second corresponds to the crossing of the llano, and the third to the scrutinizing of the land. He believes that they appear in the sequence 2-1-3.<sup>11</sup>

A close inspection of the story reveals that there are in fact only two levels of time. The second and third levels which Gordon distinguishes are in fact one; the scrutinizing actually takes place during the homeward trek, across the llano, toward home. The second level is presented as a flashback and consists of the meeting with the government delegate.

It can be shown that the first time level, which Gordon tries to divide, is only one level by the facts which follow. As the story

begins, we read "ahorita son algo así como las cuatro de la tarde" (p. 15). At the very end of the story, we are told that they have been walking for eleven hours. Since we already know that they started at dawn, and there is nothing to indicate the intervention of another day, we can calculate that from dawn to four p.m. is about eleven hours.

This calculation also shows us that time does not move forward in this story. This is achieved through the process described by Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, of repetition of thoughts and words, thus making all his words seem suspended in a given moment:<sup>12</sup>

Hemos venido caminando desde el amanecer.  
Ahorita son algo así como las cuatro de la tarde.  
Alguien se asoma al cielo, estira los ojos hacia  
donde está colgado el sol y dice:

-Son como las cuatro de la tarde.  
Ese alguien es Melitón. Junto con él, vamos  
Faustino, Esteban y yo. Somos cuatro. Yo los  
cuento: dos adelante, otros dos atrás. Miro  
más atrás y no veo a nadie. Entonces me digo:  
"Somos cuatro." (p. 15)

At the very end of the story the process of creating monotony, and thus suspending time, stops. This coincides with the travellers' arrival at good land. The tedium gives way to pleasure at being covered with dust, and the world seems to come alive:

Por encima del río, sobre copas verdes en  
las casuarinas, vuelan parvadas de chachalacas  
verdes. Eso también es lo que nos gusta.

Ahora los ladridos de los perros se oyen  
aquí, junto a nosotros, y es que el viento que  
viene del pueblo retacha en la barranca y la  
llena de todos sus ruidos. (p. 20)

This part of the story is quite brief and does not contradict the prior analysis which we have made regarding the stoppage of time, since the four p.m. and the calculation of dawn were only approximations.

Time within the flashback proceeds at two speeds. During the brief dialogue, which constitutes the bulk of the flashback, it moves somewhat slower than it does during the narrated part, which is in effect a dialogue which has been condensed and paraphrased:

Nosotros paramos la jeta para decir que  
queríamos lo que estaba junto al río. Del  
río para allá, por las vegas, donde están  
esos árboles llamados casuarinas . . . .  
Pero no nos dejaron decir nuestras cosas.  
(p. 17).

Donald K. Gordon has recognized the time dualism in "Un pedazo de noche."<sup>13</sup> The two levels of time in this story are set up very much like the dual levels in the other stories which we have already seen. What is unique about "Un pedazo de noche," however, is the fact that in Part II of the story, the psychological, past level, in which the narration has been taking place, is totally suppressed and only the present level continues. Further, the suppression of this level is accomplished by such an adept transition that one hardly notices it:

Sentí que se sentaba al pie de la cama . . . .  
.....  
Es el mismo que está sentado ahora al borde  
de mi cama, en silencio, con la cabeza entre las manos.  
(p. 14)

This transition represents a jump forward in time, from the interior (past) level, to the exterior (present) level. However, there is no way to determine how much time has ensued between the two.

There is also, in the first part, an attenuation in the interior or psychological level due to the passages of dialogue in which the narrator does not appear as narrator but rather as interlocutor:

- ¿No lo vas a llevar a su casa?
  - Para allá iba. Pero al verte varié de opinión. Se me ocurrió que el niño pasaría bien la noche con nosotros.
  - ¿Te divierte hacer eso?
  - ¿Qué dices?
  - Nada.
  - Yo a ti te había echado el ojo -
- siguió diciendo - . . . . (pp. 9-10)

In passages such as this, of which there are several, the reader feels that he is witnessing the development of the action rather than receiving it through the words of a character-narrator; thus he momentarily loses sight of the fact that this is a psychological time level, a memory which the narrator is reconstructing.

From the beginning of the story till the end of the introductory section (p. 7), time in the psychological level seems stopped. Nothing happens; the first-person narrator simply gives us some thoughts on her station in life (she is a prostitute).

The actual events of the narration start thus: "Así en esas andanzas, fue cuando conocí al que después fue mi marido . . . ." (p. 7). With this, the events are then given in sequence, and time is allowed to flow forward. The events started at night: "Una noche se me acercó un hombre" (p. 7). They end early the next morning: "Ya casi era de día. Olía a día, aunque las puertas y las casas seguían oscuras" (p. 13).

In "El día del derrumbe," the psychological time level is characterized by partial suspension of the flow of time. This level is divided into blocks by the intervention of the present level (i.e., the time period during which the narration is taking place). Within each large block, the flow of time is suspended, but the blocks follow

each other in order, thus giving the impression of time movement.

Within the psychological level, practically nothing happens.

The governor's long, ridiculous, and boring speech is the prime reason for this effect of suspension of the flow of time:

Tuxcacuenses, vuelvo a insistir: Me duele vuestra desgracia, pues a pesar de lo que decía Bernal, el gran Bernal Díaz del Castillo: "Los hombres que murieron habían sido contratados para la muerte," yo, en los considerandos de mi concepto ontológico y humano digo: ¡Me duele! con el dolor que produce ver derruido el árbol en su primera inflorescencia. (p. 3)

The exterior time level frequently intervenes in the speech:

"--Allí también hubo aplausos, ¿verdad, Melitón? (p. 3). When the psychological level starts another block, time seems to move forward, even though within the block it does not. Thus it can be seen that part of Melitón's function in this story is to keep bringing the exterior level into the psychological level, dividing it into sections and providing flux.

The impression of time movement can be verified by the fact that the interior level started in the afternoon with a banquet and ended when it was "muy noche" (p. 5).

Carlos Blanco Aguinaga has discussed the suspension of time in "¡Diles que no me maten!", which he classifies as a "cuento dramático dialogado." He considers time to be in suspension in this story, an effect which results from the fatalism and meditative laconism in the story. He calls the world of the story "ajeno a la historia," and believes that within the story there is a monotonous, obsessive force which removes the possibility of the flow of time.<sup>14</sup>



We can further observe that there is another level of time on which time does flow. This level is seen in the first and last parts of the story, which together form a unit of time in which there is chronological progression. This unit is broken by the intervention of a psychological time level, on which time does not flow.

In Part I, Juvencio pleads with his son to intercede for him with the colonel who he knows is about to execute him. We are not told the reason for this, although it is apparent in Part II that Juvencio knows the reason. In the last part of the story we see the events immediately after Juvencio's execution. The actual execution has been omitted, and this part starts thus: "ahora, por fin, se había apaciguado" (p. 93). There is a time flow in the story, from the time we see Juvencio tied up awaiting execution, to immediately after his execution, when his son comes to take him home for burial.

Blanco Aguinaga's analysis of the suspension of time in the story applies to the parts of the story which intervene between the first and the last. In these parts, we get Juvencio's recollection of the events which have brought about his present predicament. It is in these parts of the story where time seems in suspension.

This effect is achieved through another device besides those which Blanco Aguinaga has cited. We can observe that at the end of Part IV (the second-last part), we witness the colonel pronouncing Juvencio's death sentence. This logically took place just before Juvencio's entreaties to his son (Part I). Thus time has not advanced on the psychological level.

The time element in "El hombre" is extremely complex. On the first reading, one realizes that, in the first part of the story, there are two time levels, one corresponding to the hombre, or the pursued, and the other associated with his pursuer.<sup>15</sup> This fact is what caused Donald K. Gordon to classify "El hombre" as a story whose action occurs on different but simultaneous planes.<sup>16</sup> However, on closer inspection, it can be seen that the complexity of time in Part I is even greater than it at first seems.

There is an element in Part I, the river, which is not necessarily associated with either the pursued or the pursuer. The river is always described in the present tense, in contrast with the rest of the narrative which is in the past. It thus assumes an aura of eternal being, which makes it cut across both time planes. It is at the river where pursued and pursuer (and their respective time planes) meet.

Muy abajo el río corre mullendo sus aguas  
entre sabinos florecidos; meciendo su espesa corriente  
en silencio. Camina y da vueltas sobre sí mismo. (p. 39)

El río en estos lugares es ancho y hondo y no  
tropieza con ninguna piedra. (p. 42)

The eternal being aspect fits the river well, due to the constant association in Rulfo's stories of rivers and death.

The time level associated with el hombre is characterized by a lack of chronological order, which is one of the key factors used in maintaining reader disorientation. On p. 38, we get the comments of the pursuer on the murders committed by the pursued:

El que lo perseguía dijo: "Hizo un buen  
trabajo. Ni siquiera los despertó. Debí llegar  
a eso de la una, cuando el sueño es más pesado . . . ."

However, on the following page when el hombre has already reached the

river, we read the description of the actual murders:

Se persignó hasta tres veces. "Discúlpenme," les dijo. Y comenzó su tarea. Cuando llegó al tercero, le salían chorretes de lagrimas . . . . Questa trabajo matar.

In Part II we also see two time levels, but these are more like the dual levels which Rulfo uses in his other stories than they are like the ones in Part I of "El hombre." The level of the present, during which the narration is taking place, frequently intervenes in the second level to stop its flow:

Volvió a hacer la operación de secarse en pelota y luego arrendó río arriba por 'el rumbo de donde había venido.

Que me lo dieran ahorita. De saber lo que había hecho lo hubiera apachurrado a pedradas . . . .  
(p. 44)

The second level, then, begins with the shepherd's seeing the hombre at the river and flows on until he finds him there dead several days later. It is impossible to determine exactly how the second part fits into the first. The shepherd of Part II observes the hombre in the river, which is where he was at the end of Part I. However, the shepherd does not observe the presence of the pursuer, who also is at the edge of the river at the end of Part I, awaiting the return of the hombre. It is possible that the shepherd witnessed some of the events of Part I, or that the events he narrates occurred after Part I. In any case, time moves along sequentially, with the interruptions of the objective level already noted, until the final great event of the psychological level, the death of the hombre from gunshot wounds in the neck, exactly as his pursuer had threatened that he would kill him.

In "Acuérdate" the frequent use of direct address of a nameless interlocutor in the first part (which ends at the first paragraph on p. 112) and especially the form acuérdate, constantly keeps in view the time during which the actual narrating is taking place.

In the second, psychological level, there is a complete suspension of the flow of time in Part I, due to the fact that nothing at all happens on this level. The narrator spends a great deal of Part I in introducing characters of their common past (i.e., his and the interlocutor's) and giving their relationships to one another.

Acuérdate de Urbano Gómez, hijo de don Urbano,  
nieta de Dimas, aquél que dirigía las pastorelas  
y que murió recitando el "rezonga ángel maldito" . . . .  
(p. 110)

The beginning of the second part is marked by the following sentence:

Quizá entonces se volvió malo, o quizá  
ya era de nacimiento. (p. 112)

Up to this point we have been given the characters who take part in the events which are to be narrated. A plot now starts to unfold, and as the sequence of events is narrated, time seems to flow.

Lo expulsaron de la escuela antes del  
quinto año, porque lo encontraron con su  
prima la Arremangada jugando a marido y mujer  
detrás de los lavaderos . . . . (p. 112)

The story continues in this manner to the end, with one interruption by the narrator, momentarily taking the reader out of the psychological time level, in which the action takes place: "Sólo que te falle mucho la memoria, no te has de acordar de eso" (p. 112).

At the end of the story, the narrator brings us back again to the level in which the narrating is taking place: "Tú te debes acordar

de él, pues fuimos compañeros de escuela y lo conociste como yo" (p. 113).

In "No oyes ladrar los perros," much more time passes on the exterior level than the reader realizes at first. Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá affirms that in the story "ha transcurrido mucho tiempo."<sup>17</sup> Donald K. Gordon notes that the movement of the moon is the means by which the passage of time is measured.<sup>18</sup> As the story starts, "la luna venía saliendo de la tierra, como una llamarada redonda" (p. 114). At approximately the middle of the story, we see that "la luna iba subiendo, casi azul, sobre un cielo claro. La cara del viejo, mojada en sudor, se llenó de luz" (p. 116). At the end of the story, the moon is high in the sky: "Allí estaba el pueblo. Vio brillar los tejados bajo la luz de la luna" (p. 118). Although no one can say precisely how many hours and minutes have passed, it is clear that the larger part of a night has gone by.

On another level, however, time passage is in effect suspended. This is achieved essentially by the process described by Blanco Aguinaga: the monotonously repetitive, boring dialogues which seem to go nowhere.<sup>19</sup> "No oyes ladrar los perros" begins with this type of dialogue:

--Tú que vas allá arriba, Ignacio, dime si no oyes alguna señal de algo o si ves alguna luz en alguna parte.

--No se ve nada.

--Ya debemos estar cerca.

--Sí, pero no se oye nada.

--Mira bien.

--No se ve nada.

--Pobre de ti, Ignacio. (p. 114)

The process is repeated throughout the story.

The use of time in "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel" is very similar to its use in "Acuérdate." In the first part of the story, time is stopped by the shunning of ordered sequences, and the presentation of conditions rather than events.

The digression is a technique which is also used to effect the stopping of time flow:

Y regresando a donde estábamos, les comenzaba a platicar de unos fulanos que vivieron hace tiempo en Corazón de María. (p. 58)

Another technique is used to alter a traditional view of time flow when a series of events, which might be seen as an ordered sequence, is given. It consists of presenting a brief summary of the events before elaborating on them: "Después engordó. Tuvo un hijo. Luego murió. La mató un caballo desbocado" (p. 58). The narrator then presents the details which preceeded these incidents. Although the details are presented in a sequence in which time appears to flow, the reader's attitude toward this time sequence has been altered by the prior narration of its conclusion, again resulting in a personal depiction of time.

In Part II, which begins with the second paragraph of p. 61, time begins to flow. He narrates the passing of two opposing groups of soldiers, how the father joined one group and the son the other, and the return of the son with his dead father's body. The actual way in which it is narrated is little different from the way in which he narrates Matilde's getting killed by a horse, with the important exception of the fact that in Part II, the reader does not know beforehand the outcome of the action. This results in a traditional flow of time toward the goal. It also results in reader disorientation due to the juxtaposition of similar techniques with different effects.

The structure of "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas" does not exhibit great differences from that of the previous two stories, in spite of the fact that its narrator is not working from within the story.

In the first part of the story, the events of the past intermix. There is no flow of time toward anything, no ordering of events:

. . . en ocasiones, ella la cantaba en voz baja,  
como para sí misma; pero enseguida, se veía  
rodeada por unas ganas locas de llorar, y  
lloraba . . . .  
. . . En otras, se olvidaba por completo de  
que su hijo existía . . . . (p. 35)

Part II of this story, which starts on p. 36 at the second paragraph, is shorter than the second parts of the other stories with similar structure. In Part II of "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas," Rulfo narrates a connected series of related events, which serve to move time forward. He starts the series with aquella mañana which, although indefinite, serves to situate the events at a certain time. A series of definite events, in chronological order, moves the action ahead in a temporal progression. In spite of the fact that the amount of time which passes here is short, it does nevertheless flow and thus it provides a contrast with Part I, in which the passage of time is suspended.

Abrió la puerta para salir, pero  
enseguida sintió un viento frío . . . .  
Entonces regresó por su abrigo . . . .  
(p. 36)

Time is controlled by a very different means in "La noche que lo dejaron solo." In this story the flow or stopping of time is controlled through the mind of the protagonist, Feliciano Ruelas.

The story starts with Ruelas at the point of exhaustion from fleeing the authorities. He has lost all sense of time:<sup>20</sup>

"Es mejor que esté oscuro. Así no nos verán." También habían dicho eso un poco antes, o quizá la noche anterior. No se acordaba. El sueño le nublaba el pensamiento . . . .

Oyó cuando se le perdían los pasos: aquellos huecos talonazos que había venido oyendo quién sabe desde cuándo, durante quién sabe cuántas noches. (p. 105)

This time disorientation for Feliciano Ruelas is carried into the second part of the story:

Lo despertó el frío de la madrugada. La humedad del rocío.

Abrió los ojos. Vio estrellas transparentes en un cielo claro, por encima de las ramas oscuras.

"Está oscureciendo," pensó. Y se volvió a dormir. (p. 106)

He awakens, and continues his journey. After he gets down a cliff, we read: "De pronto se quedo quieto" (p. 108). From this point on, time flows. No longer does he dwell on his fear of the muleteers. He has become fully awake and aware of the world around him, and he heads straight for where he was supposed to meet his uncles. He arrives, finds them dead, and witnesses a dialogue among their murderers. He then escapes:

Feliciano Ruelas esperó todavía un rato a que se le calmara el bullicio que sentía cosquillearle el estómago. Luego sorbió tanto aire . . . . Y . . . se fue caminando . . . .

Cuando llegó al reliz del arroyo, enderezó la cabeza y se echó a correr . . . . (p. 109)

Time and fate are linked in this story.<sup>21</sup> By not pushing on with his uncles the day before, Feliciano escapes their end. He follows



their instructions on how to proceed, "aunque no a las mismas horas" (p. 107). This is what saves his life.

The last group of stories which we will consider is those in which the possibility of the passage of time is denied. Chronological progression is avoided by several means which we will study in conjunction with the stories.

Regarding the time problem in "La Cuesta de las Comadres," Donald K. Gordon has observed that the story is told looking back upon the events, that there is no chronological progression in the narrator's thoughts, and that the narration centers around life at la Cuesta and his killing of Remigio Torrico.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the first part of this story, time does not flow. Besides the lack of chronological progression which Gordon noticed, it can also be observed that the narrator emphasizes conditions, rather than happenings, thus creating a sense of stability and timelessness rather than change and progression.

Por otra parte, en la Cuesta de las Comadres,  
los Torricos no la llevaban bien con todo el mundo.  
Seguido había desavenencias. Y si no es mucho  
decir, ellos eran allí los dueños de la tierra y  
de las casas que estaban encima de la tierra . . . .  
(p. 21)

Although the episode of the robbery of the muleteer (pp. 24-26) might seem similar to other passages in which there is a flow of time, due to the apparent succession of related events, the entire episode is placed within an atemporal frame. He mentions, just before the episode begins, how he realized "aquella noche que les ayudé a robar a un arriero" that he was getting old and "ya no servía para mucho" (p. 24). Thus we see that night of long ago as part of the timeless

frame:

De ese modo fue como supe qué cosas iban a  
espíar todas las tardes los Torricos, sentados  
junto a mi casa de la Cuesta de las Comadres.  
(pp. 25-26)

Part II of the story, which begins immediately after the above episode, is organized in a similar manner. It starts thus: "A Remigio Torrico yo lo maté" (p. 26). By putting what is logically the climax of this part before any of the action which leads up to it, the reader's attitude with respect to the apparent flow of time is again altered. The traditional view of time, presented through a sequence of events leading up to a climax, has been replaced once more by Rulfo's personal view of time.

This story is unique among stories with a first-person participant narrator, in that the level of exterior time, the time in which he is narrating, also seems to be in suspension. This is due to the fact that this level is effectively disguised until the end of the story. There is a lack of such expressions as acuérdate, which in the story of the same name keep the exterior level visible, until the second-last paragraph of the story, where we read: "me acuerdo que . . . ." (p. 30). By bringing this level into full view at the very end, it seems not to move, but rather to stand still.

Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá has already noted how, in "En la madrugada," Rulfo conquers the passing of time. According to him, the impression which the reader gets, that about twenty-four hours have passed, is only an impression.<sup>23</sup> This is achieved by what Donald K. Gordon calls "parallelism of ambiente,"<sup>24</sup> that is, the story starts with a scene of morning and ends with a similar scene which gives the impression of

being that very evening. However, within the story are two sections in which old Esteban is in jail. These scenes take place long after the same day in which don Justo was killed.

Rulfo, pues, nos hace retroceder, días, semanas, acaso largos meses; y lo ha hecho como si no hubiera transcurrido todo este tiempo. Nosotros, impresionados por el patetismo del relato, no nos hemos percatado del truco. Nuestra mente estaba demasiado ocupada ordenando el pequeño rompecabezas que se le había puesto a ordenar, y, al final del cuento, nos pareció coincidir con el final del día del homicidio.<sup>25</sup>

We can further observe that the "técnica de enfoques repetidos" observed by Rodríguez-Alcalá<sup>26</sup> also adds to this denial of the passage of time. This technique consists of narrating the same events from different angles, which means that each successive focus which is given to an event simply occupies the same time period as what has already been narrated. Thus time never succeeds in advancing.

Perhaps the first hint of the atemporal nature of the story comes in the very first part, in the description of dawn. There is, in this description, an interplay of present and preterite tenses, which nevertheless does not disturb the unfolding of the story:

Allá lejos los cerros están todavía en  
sombras.

Una golondrina cruzó las calles y luego  
sonó el primer toque del alba.

Las luces se apagaron. (p. 48)

This fact of coherent unfolding of the story in spite of tense changes is reflected in the development of the story, in the parts where Esteban's narration, from jail, is used in sequence with authorial narration, and the thread of the story remains intact in spite of this chronological aberration.

Most Rulfian critics see in "Luvina" a spiritual ancestor of his novel Pedro Páramo. In the novel, the denial of the passage of time is accomplished mainly by the fact that the characters are all dead. The characters in "Luvina" are not dead, but nevertheless, time does not pass there. Carlos Blanco Aguinaga has made an analysis of the factors which Rulfo uses in his creation of an atemporal world. According to him, in the town of Luvina almost nothing happens. Everything there is forever, without change or movement in time. The exterior rhythm of life has remained in suspension. Things and events are isolated from one another, an impression which is strengthened by the speaker's repetition, always monotonous, of ideas and phrases, thus making the words appear to be in a timeless suspension.<sup>27</sup> The following passage, spoken by the professor who has lived in Luvina, describes the time situation there:

--Me parece que usted me preguntó cuantos años estuve en Luvina, ¿verdad . . . ? La verdad es que no lo sé. Perdí la noción del tiempo desde las fiebres que me lo enrevesaron; pero debió haber sido una eternidad . . . . y es que allá el tiempo es muy largo. Nadie lleva la cuenta de las horas y a nadie le preocupa cómo van van amontonándose los años. Los días comienzan y se acaban. Luego viene la noche. Solamente el día y la noche hasta el día de la muerte, que para ellos es una esperanza. (p. 101)

We have already seen the relationship which exists between "Un cuento" and Pedro Páramo. Therefore it would be natural to expect to find a similar treatment of time in both works. However, since one of the main factors which makes the world of the novel immune to the passage of time, the fact that all the characters are dead, does not figure in the development of the short story, we will have to look for

a different process which creates the atemporal world of the story.

Donald K. Gordon refers to time in "Un cuento" as a vagarious element.<sup>28</sup> However, it seems possible to discover a more detailed, complete, and organized explanation of time in this story, which will show that it is not vagarious but rather plays a definite role in the creation of reader disorientation.

The basic process which Rulfo uses in this story to impart to the reader a sense of the denial of time passage is the destruction of the boundaries between past, present, and future. He begins the story by saying "fuí a Tuxcacuexco . . . ." (p. 104) but shortly we see him on the road, and we experience a certain immediacy of the action; due to a change in tense: "Ahora yo vengo en su lugar. Traigo los mismos ojos con que ella miró las cosas . . . ." (p. 105).

The process is repeated throughout the story. Still on the road to Tuxcacuexco, we read:

Sentí el retrato de mi madre guardado en  
la bolsa de la camisa, calentandome el corazon . . . .  
Era un retrato viejo, carcomido en los bordes . . . .

Es el mismo que traigo aquí, pensando que podría  
dar buen resultado para reconocirme con mi padre.  
(p. 107)

In spite of the tense change, the thread of the story remains intact, and the reader enters an atemporal world which will be the world of the novel Pedro Páramo.

The temporal coup de grâce of the story occurs in the very last line. It is part of a dialogue between the narrator and the muleteer whom he had met on the road to Tuxcacuexco:

- . . . ¿Qué pasó por aquí?
- Un correcaminos, señor. Así les dicen a esos pájaros.
- No, yo preguntaba por el pueblo, que se ve tan solo, como si estuviera abandonado. Parece que no lo habitara nadie.
- No, no es que lo parezca. Así es. Aquí no vive nadie.
- ¿Y Pedro Páramo?
- Pedro Páramo murió hace muchos años. (pp. 107-108)

We have already witnessed the muleteer telling the narrator that Pedro Páramo will be glad to see him. Now we find that Pedro Páramo has been dead for years, a fact which can only completely disorient the reader. The only possible explanation that can be offered is that, as we have already seen, we are in a completely chaotic world here.

The chaotic nature of the world of the story also explains the passage in which is described the narrator's first meeting with the muleteer. After the narrator has been walking along and talking with him, we read:

Oí otra vez el ¡ah! del arriero.  
 Me había encontrado con él en los Encuentros,  
 donde se cruzaban varios caminos. Me estuve allí  
 esperando, hasta que al fin apareció este hombre.  
 -¿A dónde va usted? le pregunté.  
 -Voy para abajo, señor.  
 -¿Conoce un lugar llamado Tuxcacuexo?  
 -Para allá mismo voy.  
 Entonces lo seguí. Me figuré que era  
 arriero por los burros que llevaba de vacío, y me  
 fui detrás de él. . . . (p. 106)

We read all of this a page after his initial conversation with the muleteer. Although the use of the pluperfect at the beginning of the passage seems to make a smooth transition to it, the reader suddenly realizes that this passage chronologically is out of place. However, chronological order has no meaning in the world of this story, in which what seems like a normal sequence of events is unnecessary.

The results of Rulfo's time techniques are an important factor in the creation of reader disorientation. In some stories time passes at different speeds, in others it both passes and is suspended, and in some stories it does not pass at all. The destruction of a more traditional view of time deceives the reader because he is expecting a conventional depiction of it. The reader is thus forced to continually re-evaluate the story in order to be sure he has understood it.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>See notes 19 and 20 of Chapter I, p. 11.
- <sup>2</sup>Edmundo Valadés, "El cuento mexicano reciente," Armas y letras, 2nd Ser. (October-December 1960), p. 24.
- <sup>3</sup>Ramón Xirau, "Juan Rulfo, nuevo escritor de México," Insula, 16, No. 179 (October 1961), 4.
- <sup>4</sup>See note 24 of Chapter I, p. 11.
- <sup>5</sup>Jose de la Colina, "Notas sobre Juan Rulfo," Casa de las Americas, No. 26 (October-November 1964), pp. 135-136.
- <sup>6</sup>This is based on St. Augustine's idea that what happens, happens now. "It is always an experience, idea, or thing which is 'present'. Nevertheless, we can construct a meaningful temporal series accounting for past and future in terms of memory and expectation." Hans Meyerhoff, Time in Literature (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), p. 8.
- <sup>7</sup>Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, p. 69.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," pp. 33-39.
- <sup>10</sup>Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, pp. 69-70.
- <sup>11</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 72.
- <sup>12</sup>Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, p. 65.
- <sup>13</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 68.
- <sup>14</sup>Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, pp. 66-68.
- <sup>15</sup>Harss and Dohmann, p. 261.
- <sup>16</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 221.
- <sup>17</sup>Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, p. 41.
- <sup>18</sup>Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," pp. 169-170.



- <sup>19</sup> Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, pp. 65-66.
- <sup>20</sup> Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 213.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 214.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 79.
- <sup>23</sup> Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, p. 23.
- <sup>24</sup> Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 243.
- <sup>25</sup> Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-21.
- <sup>27</sup> Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, pp. 63-65.
- <sup>28</sup> Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 151.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

A basic technical element which leads to the creation of reader disorientation is the way in which the author communicates essential facts of the narrative to the reader. By withholding information in a variety of ways, or introducing information at unlikely times, the author forces the reader into greater mental effort in order to establish what is happening in the story. Sometimes it is impossible to establish facts at all, in which case ambiguity results.

We will start our study by examining the technique of developing the story with indefinite elements. In "Es que somos muy pobres," the main indefinite element which appears in the story is the anonymous narrator. Although he remains anonymous throughout the story, we do not feel so remote from him because he supplies numerous details about his family. This is the general trend of this story; that is, supplying more details and withholding less.

Another indefinite element does appear in the story, however. After the rain ruins the drying barley, the narrator says: "Lo único que pudimos hacer todos los de mi casa, fue. . . ." (p. 31). The todos los de mi casa is not a specific term, although it can be observed that it is more specific than the verb alone would be, had this subject been omitted.

An interesting use of an indefinite element is found in "El hombre." The element is the destination of both the hombre and his pursuer. The facts are known to them but are never divulged to the reader. The pursuer's knowledge of the hombre's destination is not shared with the reader:

"Me sé de memoria tus intenciones, quién eres  
y de dónde eres y adónde vas. Llegaré antes  
que tú llegues. (p. 40)

The hombre also speaks of his destination without telling where it is:

Tengo que estar al otro lado, donde no  
me conocen, donde nunca he estado y nadie  
sabe de mí, luego caminaré derecho, hasta  
llegar. (pp. 40-41)

These references can confuse the reader and make him wonder if perhaps more specific facts had been given out previously and he somehow missed them.

In "En la madrugada," there is a notable absence of indefinite or incomplete elements which would serve to interfere with the reader's apprehension of the story. The only exception is the name of the central character, who is always referred to as el viejo Esteban, with no more description than that. However, this is typical of Rulfo, as is the lack of physical description of the characters. It is also possible that the lack of a more complete name for the protagonist is less noticed due to the previous story, in which the characters were totally nameless for most of the story. However, the fact that the story is apparently being presented in a straightforward manner is in itself a source of disorientation, distracting the reader's attention from the other elements which combine to create ambiguity and confusion, such as the subtle changes in point of view and the disguised time

sequences already studied.

"El llano en llamas" begins with frequent references to nosotros, without explaining who is included in this group. In opposition to this amorphous mass is another one, ellos. Even within nosotros, the individuals are el Chihuahila, la Perra and los Cuatro, none of which nicknames aid in relieving the reader's impression of incompleteness. This is maintained throughout most of the narrative, and even where individual deeds are described, such as in the juego al toro (pp. 76-78), it is against a background of nosotros.

By starting "Luvina" with "de los cerros altos del sur, el de Luvina es el más alto y el más pedregoso," the author manages to create a nebulous, indefinite setting. He is using a relative term, sur, without giving an adequate point of reference. He also refers to los cerros altos, as if the reader were familiar with the area and would immediately recognize it, which of course is not the case, thus leaving the reader puzzled as to which high peaks to the south of what he is referring to. This latter question is somewhat cleared up once the reader realizes that the narrator is first person and not third; thus it would be assumed, to the south of where the narrator and his listener are. Nevertheless, the feeling that one gets from the start, of being in a sort of limbo, is carried through the entire story.

The character-narrator of "Luvina" is referred to as el hombre or el hombre aquel by the omniscient narrator. He in turn refers to the listener as señor. We know absolutely nothing of them, except

that the narrator lived a long time in Luvina and was a teacher there, and the listener is on his way to Luvina now. The lack of any further information about them tends to make the reader ignore them and focus his attention on the vision of Luvina.

Indefinite elements are employed only minimally in the development of "Acuérdate." In this story, such impersonal expressions as "se dice," "dicen que," "lo detuvieron," and others, are used frequently. However, these have little effect in leading the reader astray since this type of expression is common in everyday speech. Further, in an expression like "lo expulsaron de la escuela" (p. 112) or "lo detuvieron en el camino" (p. 113) it is unnecessary to tell precisely who these subjects are, and from the content the reader gets a sufficiently complete idea of who they would be.

Perhaps the most interesting occurrence of an indefinite element occurs in "No oyes ladrar los perros." Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá has already written on this:

Característico de los paisajes de Rulfo es la repentina mención de alguna realidad--cualquiera--del mundo exterior como si ya la conociera el lector desde antes, como si el lector estuviera frente a un paisaje conocido. Pero sucede que este paisaje no se ha descrito todavía, que aún no se le ha presentado.

Un ejemplo: al final de la primera página del cuento leemos:

El viejo se fue reculando hasta encontrarse con el paredón y se recargó allí sin soltar la carga de sus hombros . . . .

¿Qué paredón es éste? No lo sabemos. Es, sin embargo, "el" paredón, así, con artículo definido: el que nosotros muy por nuestra cuenta debemos figurárnoslo en el paraje que sospechamos pedregoso . . . .<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the reference to this wall with a definite article, it is quite indefinite; we have no description of it other than the fact that it is el paredón.

The indefinite elements of "Paso del Norte" do not, for the most part, produce any effect of reader disorientation. This is due to the use of the two interlocutors, the second of whom questions the first about his statement, thus clarifying immediately any vagueness.

-Me voy lejos padre, por eso vengo a darle el aviso.

- ¿Y pa ónde te vas, si se puede saber?

- Me voy pal Norte.

- ¿Y allá pos pa qué? (p. 119)

The outstanding exception to this is the father's reference to his daughter, then the words "que en paz descanse" (p. 120). We are never given any more information regarding her, although the reader cannot help wondering about the circumstances of her early death.

"La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas" starts with an extremely misleading statement: "Aquella cuna donde Crispín dormía por entonces, era más que grande para su pequeño cuerpecito" (p. 35). The cuna becomes confusing when, in the next line, we read "aun no nacía," and we realize that the cuna to which he refers is metaphorical. The por entonces is a very indefinite element which makes the reader curious as to when the entonces is.

There are two places in "Un cuento" where an indefinite ellos is used to unfocus or blur an actual character of the narrative. The first occurs just as the story begins: "Fui a Tuxcacuexco porque me dijeron que allá vivía mi padre, un tal Pedro Páramo. Mi madre me lo dijo" (p. 104). The other one occurs while the narrator is on the road with the muleteer: "- ¿Y a qué va usted a Tuxcacuexco, si se puede saber? oí que me preguntaban" (p. 105). In each case, he cites one specific speaker, but yet also refers to each with a plural verb form. In this way he tends to unfocus or blur the characters involved.

When the narrator tells us "caminábamos cuesta abajo, oyendo el trote rebotado de los burros" (p. 105) we are somewhat surprised by the reference to los burros, which have not yet appeared anywhere in the narrative. We do not know what burros he is talking about. This process is similar to the one described by Rodríguez-Alcalá in regard to landscapes, except here we have not a landscape but a burro.

In "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel" we find the use of indefinite and unidentified elements is more sustained throughout the narrative than is the case in "El día del derrumbe" and other stories. This indicates greater reliance, in "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel," upon this method of creating reader disorientation than is the case in other stories.

The narrator makes reference to nosotros but never explains who are included in this group. Especially puzzling is his statement, after he has narrated Matilde's death, that "ya para entonces no era de nosotros" (p. 59). Apparently, the nosotros is the same group of unidentified muleteers to which he referred on the preceding page.

However, his use of the plural is somewhat strange here, due to the fact that, although Matilde was friendly with all the muleteers that visited her mother's inn, she was engaged at the time to the narrator.

In his statement "la enterramos" (p. 59) it is unclear as to who is the subject of the verb. It could be the narrator and the husband, or those two plus other unknowns. The whole process of burial is summed up so quickly in those two short words that the reader feels vagueness about the event due to the lack of details, almost as if it never really happened. Since the father and son of the story did not get along, later in life, the narrator did not have many dealings with them. He knew about them "porque me lo contaron" (p. 61). We do not know if the subject of this verb is "unas cuantas ánimas" who earlier (p. 61) were mentioned (without being identified) as having taken pity on the boy, or not.

The revoltosos who pass through the town (p. 61) are also sketchily identified by the narrators: "Quién sabe qué clase de revoltosos serían y qué andarían haciendo."

"El día del derrumbe" has as its first line a very uninformative statement: "Esto pasó en septiembre" (p. 3). Of course, as the story is just beginning, the reader does not expect to be fully in touch with all of its elements, or even with its essential elements. One expects a certain lack of clarity. However, esto is probably the most indefinite subject which the author could have chosen. Had he used el derrumbe, esta aventura or even esto que voy a narrar, there would have been a certain vagueness upon which he then could elaborate as the story unfolded. Esto is as totally noncommittal a word as he could



have chosen. Even the fact that the title is "El día del derrumbe" does not necessarily relate esto to that title, in view of the varied functions of titles.

As can be seen from the preceding pages, the use of indefinite or unidentified elements is greater in some stories than in others. In some stories, it is the initial technique which Rulfo uses to start the reader disorientation. Then other processes are used to maintain the effect. In other stories indefinite or unidentified elements are used more, but this never is the main device which Rulfo employs in creating uncertainty or vagueness.

We will now study information which is withheld from the reader beyond the point at which its introduction might be considered logical. Sometimes this information serves to clarify indefinites, such as in "La noche que lo dejaron solo," and other times it is an event, a large piece of the puzzle which has been missing.

As one reads "Macario," one wonders to whom (if anyone) the monologue is directed, or what is its purpose. There is no plot development leading to a climax, no lesson to be learned from the story. This information is not revealed until the very end of the story:

Ahora estoy junto a la alcantarilla esperando a que salgan las ranas. Y no ha salido ninguna en todo este rato que llevo platicando. Si tardan más en salir, puede suceder que me duerma, y luego no habrá modo de matarlas, y a mi madrina no le llegará por ningún lado el sueño si las oye cantar, y se llenará de coraje. Y entonces le pedirá, a alguno de toda la hilera de santos que tiene en su cuarto, que mande a los diablos por mí, para que me lleven a rastras a la condenación eterna, derechito, sin pasar ni siquiera por el purgatorio, y yo no no podré ver entonces ni a mi papá ni a mi mamá, que es allí donde están . . . . Mejor seguiré platicando . . . . (p. 14)

From the length of this passage it can be seen that, even as Rulfo starts to reveal this important information, he puts it off for as long as possible by interposing as much material as he can. It is almost as if he begrudges giving the reader any important information at all.

The reader may also have wondered about the boy's parents. The only relative which is mentioned throughout the story is his godmother. Finally it is revealed that his natural parents are dead, which is actually a minor corollary to the more important justification for the story.

In "Nos han dado la tierra" we find many references to and criticisms of the land. The reason for this is not clear until we read "a nosotros nos dieron esta costra de tepetate para que la sembráramos" (p. 17). We still do not know who gave the land, but shortly el delegado and el gobierno (pp. 17-18) are introduced, thus making the story clear.

The narrator of "La cuesta de las comadres" gives a great deal of information about the Torricos, including the fact that they are dead, without even hinting at his relationship with their deaths. He finally reveals that it was he who killed one of the brothers, Remigio, and in telling how that came about, he reveals that he was present at the slaying of the other brother, Odilón. He also withholds from Remigio the information about Odilón's death until after Remigio has accused him (the narrator) of having murdered Odilón.

In the final scenes of the story, when the narrator and Remigio Torrico have their confrontation, we are told that Remigio suspects

the narrator of having murdered his brother Odilón Torrico. We are not told why till later, however, when Remigio suggests that the protagonist killed his brother in order to rob him (p. 28).

The revelation that the narrator killed Remigio is the central event of the story. Its sudden and unexpected presentation, with no preparation of the reader for such a revelation, demands a recounting of the events leading up to it. The sudden and unexpected nature of this revelation disconcerts the reader, who has been trying to follow as carefully as possible the wandering thread of the story up to that point.

In "Es que somos muy pobres," we are given no reference to the calf whose mother, apparently, was carried off by the river, until after we realize the story's main tragedy, the loss of the narrator's sister's dowry. With the calf, his sister's last hope, he brings into the story his mother, and two other sisters who became prostitutes through economic necessity. All these facts, central to the tragedy of the family in this story, are held back by the narrator until after the point where they logically would be needed. The result is that the reader starts expecting the story to be told around the theme of the flood, when in fact the flood is only the background to a greater tragedy for this family.

In Part I of "El hombre," the reader is given a situation, that of one man in deadly pursuit of another, but is not told why it exists nor who the principals are. The constant reference to the characters as el hombre and el que lo seguía, withholding their names until much

later in the story, maintains a feeling of distance from the story, as if these were not really people at all. This is reinforced by the lack of physical description, typical of Rulfo, and the association, especially of the hombre, with animals: "Los pies del hombre se hundieron en la arena como si fueran la pezuña de algún animal (p. 37).

The situation which is presented as the story opens, that of one man stalking another, is at first ambiguous and raises many questions regarding the circumstances which have brought about this situation. Slowly the relationship between the two is revealed by menacing comments such as "así que será fácil," or "el ansia deja huellas siempre. Eso lo perderá" (p. 37).

The reasons for the enmity between the two are likewise revealed slowly, but the constant omission of subject pronouns successfully attenuates our understanding of the relationship involved:

El que lo perseguía dijo: "Hizo un buen trabajo. Ni siquiera los despertó. Debíó llegar a eso de la una. . . ." (p. 38)

This is not clarified until the second part, where a new narrator, a shepherd, explains that the hombre murdered the family of his pursuer. "¿Dice usted que mató a todita la familia de los Urquidi?" (p. 45).

From the descriptions given on p. 38 and p. 39, the reader would not be able to understand the facts that the shepherd later tells him.

A similar situation is to be found in the hombre's statement that "no debí matarlos a todos; me hubiera conformado con el que tenía que matar" (p. 40). Again, the reader does not know why he had to kill anyone, nor who the person is. This is clarified by his pursuer later, who explains that he (the pursuer) murdered the hombre's brother (p. 41).

Finally, as Donald K. Gordon has shown,<sup>2</sup> the shepherd's finding the hombre with bullet holes in the neck confirms the threat that his assassin made to kill him in that manner (p. 38).

As the shepherd speaks, we do not realize that he has a listener till we see him address the listener as señor licenciado (p. 44). Then we not only realize that there is a listener, but that he is a judge. The shepherd's attitude in the judge's presence is apologetic, a fact which is clarified by the following: "¿De modo que ora que vengo a decirle lo que sé, yo salgo encubridor?" (p. 46). The judge has accused him of collaborating with the fugitive and has threatened to jail him because of it.

We listen to Esteban's monologues, in "En la madrugada," not knowing what his perspective on the story is. The lack of such knowledge is not noticed since the unfolding of events is in a logical sequence. However, we then read "desde el momento que me tienen aquí en la cárcel . . . ." and suddenly realize that the narrator is in jail, a fact formerly withheld.

Fundamental to understanding the tragedy of "Talpa" is knowing the relationship that exists between the characters. This information is kept from the reader, even as the narrator tells us "a Tanilo Santos entre Natalia y yo lo matamos" (p. 55). Shortly after this, we read "la idea de ir a Talpa salió de mi hermano Tanilo" (p. 56). In this way, we are informed that the narrator killed his own brother. What we still do not know is that Natalia is Tanilo's wife, a fact which is included later. By keeping this information from the reader, even as

he tells about burying Tanilo, he misleads the reader as to the nature of the story which he is about to tell. When the narrator suggests and then clearly indicates his adulterous relationship with his sister-in-law, we are given the motive for their desire to kill Tanilo Santos. It is these facts which contribute to the particularly unpleasant theme of this story.

"El llano en llamas" begins with the shout: "¡Viva Petronila Flores!" (p. 66). When the shout is repeated a few lines later, a slight change in it communicates vital information: "¡Viva mi general Petronilo Flores!" We now know considerably more about the situation which is unfolding than we did before.

The introduction of the narrator's name does not come until nearly one-fourth of the way through the story where we read: "- ¡Epa tú, Pichón!" (p. 70). The reader also does not know the identity of the two armed groups which are opposing each other until he reads "no supieron decirnos si ya se hubieran retirado los federales" (p. 70).

The fact that the narrator was in jail is never mentioned until very matter-of-factly he refers to "uno que estuvo conmigo en la cárcel" (p. 83). This surprises the reader, partly because of the sudden change from the adventures of Pedro Zamora and his bandits which it marks.

The dialogue with which "¡Diles que no me maten!" begins offers no identification of the characters, other than just a name. The reader continues, searching for a clue that will explain something about why this situation exists and who the characters are. When he

reads: "según eso, yo soy tu hijo" (p. 85), the relationship is now known but the name of the father is lacking. This is given on p. 86 in the explanation of the events leading up to the situation presented in the dialogue: "al que él, Juvencio Nava, tuvo que matar . . . ."

All through the story we know that Juvencio is going to be killed. We are told about his murder of Lupe Terreros some thirty-five years earlier, which is somehow connected with the fact that now Juvencio is going to be killed. What we do not know is who has captured Juvencio, a fact which comes out on p. 91 and is the climax of the story. His captor says:

- Guadalupe Terreros era mi padre. Cuando crecí y lo busqué me dijeron que estaba muerto. Es difícil crecer sabiendo que la cosa de donde podemos agarrarnos para enraizar está muerta. Con nosotros, eso pasó. (p. 91)

This revelation explains why Juvencio has been taken prisoner, why he is being subjected to mental torture, and why he will be killed, in spite of his advanced age and relative innocuousness.

The principal element of "Luvina" is the atmosphere of the story itself, thus the author suppresses any information which does not contribute to it, leaving the characters as two quasi-blanks. The narrator, we eventually learn, was a teacher in Luvina for many years (p. 102). His listener, we eventually find out, is about to go to Luvina, a fact which justifies the story (p. 96).

In this story we again encounter the introduction of nos and nosotros with no identification of who is included in the group. The narrator starts telling of his first trip to Luvina and, with no warning, changes from first person singular to plural. The reader has

no way of determining who these people are until later when the narrator says "nosotros, mi mujer y mis tres hijos, nos quedamos allí" (p. 98). Shortly after this, he introduces the wife's name.

In "La noche que lo dejaron solo," the reasons for the characters' actions are not stated until after they are needed, preventing the reader from fully understanding the reasons for what is happening.

Feliciano is travelling with "los de adelante." We do not even know how many they are until near the end of the story, nor any details about them. They are in a hurry and do not wish anyone to see them, but we also do not know the reasons for this. A statement such as "Es mejor que esté oscuro. Así no nos verán" (p. 105) may arouse the reader's curiosity about who will not see them and why, but since no answer is forthcoming until the end of the story, he is forced to wait and see.

When we read, concerning Feliciano: "¡Cristo! dijo. Y ya iba a gritar: ¡Viva Cristo Rey! . . . ." (p. 108) we are now in a position to see the story as more complete. This revelation tells us much about Feliciano, his companions, and who it is that they fear will catch them.

Finally we are told, on p. 108, that Feliciano "pudo verlos mejor, reconocerles la cara: eran ellos, su tío Tanis y su tío Librado," we now know who his travelling companions were. Formerly they were just ellos, or los de adelante.

The final revelation of important information substitutes again for a climax and causes all the pieces of the puzzle to fall into place. This occurs when one of the soldiers says: "Dicen que el que



falta es un muchachito, pero muchachito y todo fue el que le tendió la emboscada a mi teniente Parra y le acabó su gente" (p. 108). This is said as the soldiers view the hanged uncles of Feliciano and are awaiting his arrival to hang him also.

"Acuérdate" begins with a long and very detailed genealogy of the characters involved. However, when the reader tries to visualize the relationships involved, he discovers that the apparent completeness of the description is only an illusion, and that the author has withheld just enough information to make it impossible, for the moment, to determine the actual relationships involved. A series of unexplained indefinite elements keeps the reader's total apprehension of the facts an elusive goal.

Acuérdate de Urbano Gómez, hijo de don Urbano, nieto de Dimas, aquel que dirigía las pastorelas, y que murió recitando el "rezonga ángel maldito" cuando la época de la influencia. De esto ya hace años. Pero te debes de acordar de él. Acuérdate que le decíamos el abuelo por aquello de que su otro hijo, Fidencio Gómez, tenía dos hijas muy juguetonas: una . . . que le decían La Arremangada y otra . . . . (p. 110)

Indefinite elements, such as the "el" of the fifth line and the "su" of the seventh, although they seem to make sense, erect a barrier between the story and the careful reader who tries to align all the relationships. It would appear that these two words refer to Urbano Gómez (don Urbano's son), while in reality they are referring to don Urbano himself. This fact, however, cannot be established until later in the story when we are told that la Arremangada is Urbano's cousin, and Fidencio Gómez is his uncle (p. 112). The addition of this new knowledge allows the reader to clarify what otherwise was somewhat out of focus.

In "Anacleto Morones," the narrator tells us clearly that he has some information which is vital to understanding the development of the story, but withholds this information as long as possible.

As the story opens, the narrator-protagonist sees a group of women heading for his farmstead and he starts making disparaging remarks about them. He immediately tells us: "sabía lo que andaban haciendo y a quién buscaban. Por eso me dí prisa a esconderme hasta el fondo del corral . . . ." (p. 127). Likewise, the women tell him: "te venimos a ver a ti . . . ." (p. 127), and "-Traemos un encargo . . . ." (p. 128), but none of this is explained, thus forcing the reader to continue reading, trying to find the explanation of these facts in the pages that follow. Because such an explanation is not forthcoming, the reader may begin to wonder if he has indeed missed it. The reader may almost feel that they are beginning to play with him when they almost (but not quite) tell what they want: "-Pues se trata de esto . . . . Pero no te vayas a molestar en darnos de comer" (p. 129). They go on from here, and never return to explain what they have come for.

Finally, on p. 134, we are told that the women want our protagonist to return to town with them to testify to the "miraculous" deeds of one Anacleto Morones, in order to help their campaign to have him canonized as a saint.

The dialogue which begins p. 105 of "Un cuento" is actually the second part of a dialogue whose first part does not appear until p. 106. In the preface to the first part, the other interlocutor is introduced. This is information which logically should precede the

whole dialogue, and its tardy introduction forces the reader to relate it to its second part, already given, in order for the story to make sense. This method of giving the second part of the dialogue before the first part underscores the atemporal nature of the story.

The opening paragraphs of "Un pedazo de noche" prove confusing due to the fact that no hint is ever given that the narrator is a female. This is hinted at in the second paragraph, but not until she makes a reference to her husband can the reader be sure. Then what precedes this revelation begins to make more sense.

The story starts immediately with a reference to the initiation ritual of tronar la nuez, which Donald K. Gordon notes is to be understood only by the initiated.<sup>3</sup> The meaning of this expression is never clarified in the story. Right after mentioning it, the narrator states: "No quiero decir en qué consistía aquello, porque todavía, calculando que no me quede ni un pedazo de vergüenza, hay algo dentro de mí que busca desbaratar los malos recuerdos" (p. 7). This statement and several of those which follow it, such as "yo estaba entonces en mis comienzos" (p. 7), which the reader does not have sufficient information to understand, show that the narrator has again assumed that the reader has some information which in fact he does not have. The result is that the reader has to make greater effort in order to follow the development of the story than would be the case if he were given the needed information.

The opening statement "Alguien me avisó que en el callejón de Valerio Trujano había un campo libre" (p. 7) also helps lead the reader into a situation which he needs to disentangle due to the alguien and

the lack of hints regarding the campo libre. The reader's inability to understand is compounded by the fact that he does not yet know that the narrator is a female, a unique situation in Rulfo's stories.

Another interesting, although little-used technique, is that of introducing an important element of the story along with several unimportant ones, giving the same apparent degree of importance to each. The significance of this important element is not made clear until later. This technique is very nearly the inverse of the first technique which was discussed in this chapter in which often the reader recognizes that the indefinite element could help increase his apprehension of the story. Here we are given an element which goes unrecognized as essential.

The first story in which Rulfo uses the technique is "La Cuesta de las Comadres." The narrator tells how the Torricos used to come to his cabin and spend hours looking toward the road to Zapotlán. He then discusses Remigio's one eye and how it had a great range of view. Without giving any explanation, he tells how, when the eye "tenía en quien recargar la mirada," the two brothers would disappear for a while (p. 23). The subject then abruptly changes and a long discourse follows on changing economic fortunes of the area, each section of approximately the same length. One would assume that each section is of the same importance in the development of the story, and no way is given to establish that the first part is essentially a thread of the narrative and the other not.

This process is again used in the final scenes of the narrative. Remigio Torrico has come to the narrator's shack to accuse him of

murdering his (Remigio's) brother. The narrator is sewing a torn coat as Remigio accosts him. A page later we are told how the coat got torn. It was ripped by two goats as he took them to market, from whose sale he got the money to buy a blanket (and not by stealing it from the dead Torrico, as he is accused of doing). Thus a seemingly chance element fits into the story and puts a large needle into the hands of the narrator, with which he defends himself against Remigio, thereby causing the death of the latter.

"Es que somos muy pobres" begins with the listing of a series of disasters, among which is the loss of a cow. The only hint that this disaster is unique among the others is the fact that it is set apart in a short paragraph by itself.

As the flood was in progress, the narrator and his sister went up the cliff from the river to hear what people were saying, because the noise down below was too loud to hear what was going on. All the noise and going up the cliff are almost unrelated to the main thread of the story, except for the fact that he connects them by saying:

Allí fue donde supimos que el río se había llevado  
a la Serpentina; la vaca esa que era de mi hermana  
Tacha porque mi papá se la regaló para el día de  
su cumpleaños . . . . (p. 32)

Rulfo has used two facts which are basically unrelated to the narrative, to tie in a fact which is central to it. This use of extraneous elements and central elements causes the reader to be temporarily left in limbo, since he cannot at first distinguish between them. If it were not for the fact that this is Rulfo's purpose in using these extraneous elements, it would almost seem as if the unity of the work had been broken.

As Juvencio Nava, in "¡Diles que no me maten!" recalls how he killed don Lupe Terreros some thirty-five years ago, he mentions don Lupe's family. However, he recalls that he feared nothing from them:

El difunto don Lupe era solo, solamente con su mujer y los dos muchachitos todavía de a gatas. Y la viuda pronto murió dizque de pena. Y a los muchachitos se los llevaron lejos donde unos parientes. Así que, por parte de ellos, no había que tener miedo. (pp. 87-88)

Juvencio dismisses the dead man's family from his mind, and so does the reader. He continues with his story of constant harassment through the years, always fearful of being brought to justice. This continued narration tends to keep any thoughts of the murdered man's family out of the picture. Even Juvencio himself does not realize that his captor is don Lupe's son, until the son tells his own story, almost at the end of the narrative.

The final story in which this technique makes a brief appearance is "Anacleto Morones." Lucas Lucatero has left the women for a moment and has gone to the corral to gather up eggs. He notices a stone pile which seems, to him, to look like a grave, so he scatters the rocks. The significance of this is not realized by the reader until much later when we find that Lucas' father-in-law, el Niño Anacleto, was buried there, and he (Lucas) did not wish the visiting beatas to realize this fact.

Sometimes facts which are necessary to an understanding of a story's development are neither given nor withheld; that is, the reader is given sufficient information from which he can deduce what he needs

to know and without being given direct access to the information. This means of imparting information makes the reader involve himself in the story in order to fully understand it. Furthermore, since the reader has no way of knowing beforehand whether he will be required to deduce facts from the information which is given, or whether the facts will be made clear later, or whether or not there is even enough information given to clearly establish necessary facts, he cannot help feeling a certain disorientation with regard to the development of the story.

In "Macario," the reader must transfer the name Macario from the title to the protagonist. Nothing is said in the story to make this transferral for him, which is a function of the first-person narrative mode, and is facilitated by the fact that only one nameless character appears in the story.

When Macario refers to the previous night and says "estábamos cenando" (p. 9), the lack of a subject for estábamos keeps certain important information from the reader. Later, he introduces Felipa, and then his godmother. Since these are the only characters mentioned, we can assume that they together form the unmentioned subject of estábamos.

The age and mental condition of the boy, Macario, are not apparent at first. However, he soon states: "dicen en la calle que estoy loco" (p. 10), and if the reader harbors any doubts about the validity of this statement, they are quickly dispelled by the fact that they tie him up at Mass, and especially by the fact that he amuses himself by banging his head against the porch pillars and the ground. His age is suggested in a general way, but it always remains imprecise.

Deduction is useful in establishing time relationships in "Nos han dado la tierra." As indicated in Chapter III, the fact that they have been walking from dawn till four p.m. (p. 15), when compared with the statement that they have been walking for eleven hours (p. 20), enables us to establish time levels within the story.

At the end of "La Cuesta de las Comadres," the narrator skips from the narration of his speech directed to the body of the man he has just killed, to telling us that the moon had changed position when he returned to the Cuesta with his empty fishing basket. He further states that, before putting the basket away, he washed Remigio's blood out of it. We thus deduce the horrible fact that he must have dismembered Remigio and carried him away in the basket.

The lack of specific information in "El hombre" forces the reader into a continual process of deduction and inference in order to ascertain the facts of the story's development. On p. 38 we read: "comenzó a perder el ánimo cuando las horas se alargaron . . . ." There is no antecedent which can be definitely stated as the subject of comenzó. Shortly after this we read "sacó el machete y cortó las ramas duras . . . .", from which we infer that it is the hombre who is doing the action, since he must precede his pursuer. This process of forcing the reader to deduce, from the action and description, which character is involved, is repeated throughout the story.

We have already seen in Chapter II the effects of narrator changes in "En la madrugada." The identity of the new narrator of Part II is



revealed slowly through a series of hints. The narrator tells that he was cold, and then he arrived at the corral but nobody opened the gate for him (p. 49). Up to this point the reader may begin associating these elements with "el viejo Esteban," but upon reading "no les dije nada a las vacas, ni les expliqué nada . . . ." (p. 49), since Esteban was first introduced as the man herding cattle, the association is made much more obvious. The identification is given almost (but not quite) explicitly on the following page in Part II when the point of view changes to third person and we read "el viejo Esteban dejó entrar las vacas una por una . . . ." (p. 50), thus permitting the reader, through deduction, to be relatively certain that Part III was narrated by Esteban.

Esteban's interlocutor in the conversation which takes place in jail is never introduced in the story. All we know about him is the little bit which we can deduce from the fact that Esteban refers to him as "usted," and from the gist of the conversation. He could be a clergyman, a friend, a jailer, or someone in the next cell. In order to understand the story, it is not necessary for the reader to know any more about this person; however, the mere presence of one about whom so little is known cannot help but leave in the reader an unfulfilled curiosity.

We have already seen the function in "El llano en llamas," of the shout "¡Viva mi general Petronilo Flores!" in identifying the characters as soldiers. Later, from the shout "¡Viva Pedro Zamora!" (p. 68) we can assume, by analogy, that Pedro Zamora is Petronilo Flores' counterpart in the opposing band of soldiers, thus he is a

soldier and a general.

After the introductory statement of "¡Diles que no me maten!" we read "lo habían traído de madrugada . . . ." (p. 86). The person to whom lo refers is unclear, due to the fact that lo is the first word of Part II of the story. Its meaning is later suggested when we read ". . . sabía bien que lo iban a matar . . . ." (p. 86). Since there are no other possibilities, the lo is identified by elimination or default as Justino's father.

When we read, on p. 89, "desde entonces lo supo," the "what" and the "when" are unclear. This is due to the fact that this statement begins a new paragraph, yet the idea has not really changed from the preceding paragraph. This statement would seem to be a logical continuation of the last statement of the preceding paragraph: "Se lo dijeron;" however, because the statements are in two paragraphs, the reader is unsure of what the reference is.

A blank space between parts of the story again leads to uncertainty when we read "-Mi coronel, aquí está el hombre" (p. 91). Because a colonel was mentioned at the very beginning of the story (p. 85), we associate this one with the previous one and so this scene makes more sense. The immediately preceding paragraphs are of little help in understanding this scene because there is not a logical progression from them to it.

At the end of the story, the actual execution of Juvencio is not narrated. We know that it took place by the events leading up to it and those immediately after it. These events could only accompany his execution at the hands of the colonel.

The sketchiness with which Rulfo presents his characters in "Luvina" is one major element in the atmosphere of fragmentation of life (isolation of the story from the ebb and flow of life) which Luis Leal has commented on in his article on "Luvina."<sup>4</sup> Each character exists as a function of another character. When the narrator says "-¡Oye, Camilo, mándanos otras dos cervezas más!" (p. 95) we realize the presence of a bartender. We know from the conversation that the narrator is talking to someone who is about to go to Luvina. The narrator is revealed as a profesor when he quotes one of the inhabitants of Luvina, talking to him: "¿Dices que el Gobierno nos ayudará, profesor?" (p. 102). This is all the information which we are given about these people. Almost all that we know of the story, which is little, comes through deductions and assumptions, thus leaving the reader a distinct feeling that something basic to the story is missing, which is true, and important to Rulfo's technique.

In "Acuérdate," what we know of the narrator and his interlocutor comes mainly from what we can deduce from the narrative itself. The use of the second person form suggests from the beginning that they are good friends. A statement such as "Sólo que te falle mucho la memoria, no te has de acordar de eso" (p. 112) suggests that both men are probably now reaching an advanced age. Finally, the last statement, "Tú te debes acordar de él, pues fuimos compañeros de escuela . . . ." (p. 113) allows us to deduce a bit more about these men, that they have known each other all their lives and are now reminiscing. This meager information, which we get by deduction and inference, is all we know of them.

The necessity of assuming and deducing story elements is minor in "Anacleto Morones," and is related especially to the characters. The dialogue of the story is mostly between Lucas Lucatero and one of the women who come to bother him, Pancha. He refers to her variously as Pancha and "la hija de Ponciano." Since he treats her as spokeswoman for the group (p. 131), and we already know that Pancha is the spokeswoman, therefore he is talking to Pancha at this point and not one of the others. Although this element is of minor importance in the story, when added to the other elements which have been employed by the author, the result, the atmosphere of disorientation, is enhanced.

Another scene which requires the reader to deduce facts from what is given occurs when Nieves García is talking with Lucas about their former sexual relationship, and tells him of her abortion:

-Mejor cállate, Lucas Lucatero. Dios no te perdonará lo que hiciste conmigo. Lo pagarás caro.

-¿Hice algo malo contigo? ¿Te traté acaso mal?

-Lo tuve que tirar. Y no me hagas decir eso aquí delante de la gente. Pero para que te lo sepas: lo tuve que tirar. Era una cosa así como un pedazo de cecina. ¿Y para qué lo iba a querer yo, si su padre no era mas que un vaguetón? (p. 132)

The reader is unprepared for the statement "lo tuve que tirar" and at first is perplexed by its reference. Not until the last sentence of the exchange can one draw a safe conclusion as to what has actually happened.

Finally, we are told directly who killed Anacleto Morones. As is typical of Rulfo, he omits the details of the murder,<sup>5</sup> and in this way we can not know the responsible party. We conclude that it is Lucas Lucatero, for we witness Anacleto and Lucas having an argument, and

then we read:

Le entró coraje. Pateaba el suelo y  
 urgía irse . . . .  
 "¡Qué descanses en paz, Anacleto Morones!",  
 dije cuando lo enterré. (p. 142)

Although the basic means of achieving reader disorientation in "Un cuento" is through manipulation of time, the necessity of deduction plays a small part. When the muleteer tells the protagonist that "todo ese terrenal es de él" (p. 107), we assume that "él" is Pedro Páramo. This is possible due to the small number of characters involved and thus the small number of possibilities from which to choose.

When the protagonist says to the muleteer "¿Qué pasó por aquí?" and the answer is "Un correcaminos" (pp. 107-108) we assume the muleteer has seen tracks, even though the protagonist immediately responds with "No, yo preguntaba por el pueblo, que se ve tan solo" (p. 108).

In "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel," the reader's need to make assumptions based on what he is given is a function of the narrative mode which Rulfo has chosen to employ. By using first person narration, the role of the omniscient narrator in guiding the reader through the story is absent; thus a part of this role falls to the reader himself. For example, when the narrator states "era un hombrón así de grande" (p. 57), he has apparently made a gesture to indicate the lad's size. Since he has made this gesture, we can further assume that the narrator has an audience (other than his reader). Later we can assume that it is a group of people whom he does not know well: "Ojalá que ninguno de los presentes se ofenda por si es de allá; pero yo sostengo mi juicio" (p. 58).

It must be pointed out that it is not necessary, in this story, for the reader to have access to many facts about the audience for him to understand the story. Here we have another case in which the omission of details which are not actually central to the story's development serves to reinforce the atmosphere of haziness which permeates many of Rulfo's stories.

"El día del derrumbe" contains two types of information which the reader must deduce from content. The first of these again has to do with the existence of an audience. We have in this story a dialogue between two interlocutors, with an undescribed audience. With the exception of the narrative mode, the relation of the audience to the story exactly duplicates that which is found in "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel."

The second type of information which must be deduced from this story is the attitude of the townspeople towards the governor who comes to visit them after the disaster. Although we are told, regarding the governor's visit, that "estuvimos muy contentos" (p. 3), we are then presented with a series of examples of how crude he was, such as how he wiped his hands on his socks instead of on the napkin after eating fried chicken. With all his bombastic rhetoric, he is represented as a ridiculous figure, although no one ever criticizes him directly but rather everyone defers to him and the authority of his office. Thus there is irony here, the means that Rulfo chooses to make a commentary on society, which is a seldom-seen aspect of his work.

Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, in his study of "En la madrugada," has discussed the deliberate use of ambiguity in Rulfo's stories:

Rulfo, al parecer, no quiere que las cosas sean claras. No las explica ni da al lector las claves suficientes para una elucidación cabal a cargo de éste . . . .

El arte de Rulfo parece que se complaciera en una ambigüedad sugestiva, en una borrosidad misteriosa. Pero suprimamos eso de "parece" y afirmemos que tal ambigüedad y tal borrosidad son notas esenciales de su narrativa, resultando de arbitrios estilísticos sabiamente manejados, que, a su vez, responden a una visión personal de la vida y del arte.<sup>6</sup>

Rulfo uses this technique of deliberately creating an ambiguous enigmatic situation not only in "En la madrugada," but in numerous other stories. The particular information withheld may be of secondary importance, causing the reader only a slight annoyance, or more commonly, it may be very basic information, resulting in forced collaboration between reader and author in creating the story.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Rulfo's stories frequently end with an ambiguous situation in which the reader cannot be sure of the final outcome, or cannot definitely resolve the major questions which the story raises. This is certainly the case in "En la madrugada," which Rodríguez-Alcalá has studied and from which study the preceding quote is taken.

We see in "Macario" an example of the former type of withheld information in the character Felipa. Reference is made to "la leche de Felipa" (p. 10), thus implying that she was recently pregnant. However, no reference is ever made to the child, or its father.

As the story ends with Macario still sitting by the sewer, continuing his aimless mental wandering, one cannot help but wonder what is to become of this unfortunate orphan. The only possible answer is, of course, that there is no way to tell. It is not Rulfo's purpose

to suggest a solution to this dilemma, but rather to show the dilemma in an artistic fashion.

As the characters of "Nos han dado la tierra" are crossing the barren plain, we are kept from their thoughts. All the narrator tells us is: "no decimos lo que pensamos" and "de haber llovido quizá se me ocurrieran otras cosas." All these elements are left hanging, leaving the reader to make what he wishes of them.

The reader is likewise forced into piecing together events which are not directly described by the narrator when he is told "en eso de quitarnos la carabina hicieron bien" (p. 17), or in the reference to all the horses that the men used to have (p.17). We know that they were taken, but we do not know why or by whom or when. Rulfo presents these facts to the reader as if he did in fact know. This technique is similar to the one used in "No oyes ladrar los perros" in introducing a paredón, as well as in other stories,<sup>8</sup> with the difference that here we have the introduction into the story of an event, whereas with "no oyes ladrar los perros" it is a question of just one element of the setting. Similarly, when the narrator first notices Esteban's chicken, which he has been hiding under his coat, the story is near an end. Why this detail did not come out before is not clear, although it appears that Esteban has been hiding it out of fear that the others would take it from him. Related to this episode are Esteban's references to his house and his corral, which seemingly had no relation to previous events in the story.

"No han dado la tierra" ends typically, with an ambiguous situation. What will the characters of the story do now? They had been



given government land, but it seems to be unfit for production of anything. The reader cannot be sure if they have permanently abandoned it, only to continue with their old style of life, or if they may try to use it for something such as raising mares, as was suggested by Melitón (p. 19). In any case, the end of the story does not present a situation which is different from the beginning. There is no climax nor denouement, simply an ending.

In "Es que somos muy pobres," the situation which remains unresolved is the fate of a calf. This calf and its mother were to be a dowry for Tacha, to enable her to marry well and thus avoid following her sisters into prostitution. The cow drowned in the flood, so now Tacha's only hope for a dowry is that the calf may still be alive. The narrator tells us: ". . . no sabemos si el becerro está vivo . . . ." (p. 33), and "la única esperanza que nos queda es que el becerro esté todavía vivo" (p. 34).

Although the problem is never resolved, the outcome of the situation is suggested by the following:

. . . los dos pechitos de ella se mueven de  
de arriba abajo, sin parar, como si de repente  
comenzaran a hincharse para empezar a trabajar  
por su perdición. (p. 36)

"Talpa" is a story in which the ambiguous element enters at the end. The unresolved question centers around the relationship between the narrator and his sister-in-law, whose lustful desire for one another has caused them to hasten the death of her husband. The problem is stated in very ambiguous terms and then just left, with no attempt by the author to suggest a solution:

Quizá hasta empecemos a tenernos miedo uno al otro. Esa cosa de no decirnos nada desde que salimos de Talpa tal vez quiera decir eso. Tal vez los dos tenemos muy cerca el cuerpo de Tanilo. . . . (p. 65)

Later we read:

Es de eso de lo que quizá nos acordemos aquí más seguido: de aquel Tanilo que nosotros enterramos en el camposanto de Talpa. . . . (p. 65)

This story also seems to stop without reaching any conclusion, leaving the reader with an unsatisfied feeling, as if something more might be said.

An element of minor ambiguity appears in "Acuérdate," and although it does not interfere with the reader's ability to understand the story, it demonstrates well Rulfo's propensity for keeping the facts of the story in terms which are non-concrete, thus keeping the reader constantly evaluating and re-evaluating the facts as he receives them. Discussing the nature of Urbano Gómez, he says: "Quizá entonces se volvió malo, o quizá ya era de nacimiento" (p. 112). The nature of Urbano Gómez, a fact of the story, cannot be traced from any definite point.

Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá has pointed out the important role of ambiguity in "No oyes ladrar los perros." This is especially true in regard to the treatment of the son, Ignacio, whom his father is carrying across the desert. Rodríguez-Alcalá says that it is impossible to determine Ignacio's reaction to his father's reproof, or to determine whether the son is dead or merely unconscious when they arrive at the town of Tonaya. This ambiguity, according to Rodríguez-Alcalá, is the

result of Rulfo's narrative technique:

Resulta, sí, indudable, que Rulfo economiza al máximo lo descriptivo y lo analítico. Y que el resultado de esta técnica es, por una parte, una visión poderosa, inolvidable, de las escenas que presenta; y por otra, una penumbrosidad, una ambigüedad, un misterio que potencian nuestro interés estético.<sup>9</sup>

The ambiguous ending is used in "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas" in a somewhat modified form. As the widowed expectant mother, to whom the expected child means everything, is getting her coat from the top of the closet, she suddenly falls. The story ends as she is falling but before she hits the floor. The reader knows that a tragedy is impending; only the details are left for him to supply from his own mind.

Ambiguity is also an important element in "Un cuento." In the opening paragraph, the narrator tells us that his father is "un tal Pedro Páramo" (p. 104). He never knew his father, so he promises his dying mother that he will go find him. He quotes her as saying "se llama de este modo y de este otro" (p. 104). The meaning of this statement is never made clear to the reader, and no information is given from which one might deduce it.

The ending is apparently ambiguous until one realizes how the time element of the story functions. The narrator is going in search of Pedro Páramo, whom he has been discussing with a muleteer. The latter has told the narrator that Pedro Páramo will be glad to see him. Now the muleteer tells him that Pedro Páramo has been dead for years. The reader's first reaction is one of confusion before an

apparently inexplicable situation; however, upon re-reading the story and upon realizing the time function (see Chapter III) the ambiguity no longer bothers the reader.

Donald K. Gordon has pointed out the use of an enigmatic end in "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel."<sup>10</sup> The son rides back to town carrying his father's body on a horse. The two never got along well; rather they just tolerated each other. Since the two were involved in a military campaign on opposing sides, it is impossible to tell whether the father died in action, or whether his son killed him, or whether he died of natural causes. The situation here is similar to that of "En la madrugada."

"El día del derrumbe" offers an interesting variation of ambiguity in the enigmatic ending. As the story opens, several lines are used to establish the date on which the events of the story occurred (September 18 of the past year). Several more lines are used to establish other important details, all of which Donald K. Gordon sees as an attempt to establish Melitón (one of the interlocutors) as a person with a good memory and therefore an authoritative figure to whom the narrator can appeal for supporting testimony during his narration.<sup>11</sup>

At the very end of the story, however, the narrator suddenly remembers that all these events occurred not on September 18 but on September 21, and he states that he remembers because it was on that same day that his last child was born. Since such an event is so significant in one's life, it is unlikely that he is confused;

Therefore, the authoritativeness of Melitón, upon which much of the preceding narrative rests, is challenged. The reader then finds it difficult to accept Melitón as authoritative, thus putting in doubt much of the story.

The end of "Un pedazo de noche" is left somewhat up in the air, leaving the impression that perhaps the protagonist is not happy in her present situation. This is further reinforced by the use of leaders at the end, as if leaving something unsaid:

Parece como si se le hubiera olvidado el trato  
que hicimos cuando me casé con él: que me  
dejaría descansar; de otra manera acabaría por  
perderse entre los agujeros de una mujer des-  
baratada por el desgaste de los hombres . . . . (p. 14)

The several techniques described in this chapter together form the basis of Juan Rulfo's communications network. Rulfo seldom gives out precise information, and when he does, it is often to be found in an unexpected place. He rather prefers to be vague, incomplete, or allusive, thus forcing the reader into much more than a merely passive response to the stories. The mysteriousness which Rulfo weaves into his stories frequently forces the reader to re-read and carefully evaluate them. Much of the satisfaction to be gained from reading Juan Rulfo is in fact based on an appreciation of the formal elements of the stories.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, p. 39.
- <sup>2</sup> Donald K. Gordon, "Juan Rulfo: Cuentista," p. 203.
- <sup>3</sup> Idem, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 66.
- <sup>4</sup> Luis Leal, p. 4.
- <sup>5</sup> For a commentary on the use of this technique in Pedro Páramo, see Mariana Frenk, p. 22.
- <sup>6</sup> Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, pp. 22-23.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 207.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 39.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 42.
- <sup>10</sup> Donald K. Gordon, "The Short Stories of Juan Rulfo," p. 48.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

## CHAPTER V

### SETTING

Most of Rulfo's stories are set in the general area of his native state of Jalisco. This is a rugged, arid, hostile environment whose economic depression is rooted not only in geographic factors, but also in human factors such as revolutions and mismanagement of natural resources.

It is interesting to note the appearance in Rulfo's stories of place-names such as San Gabriel and Tonaya, which are actual villages in Jalisco. Other names appear with a slight change: the Zapotlán of "Talpa" has a name which is similar to that of the village of Zapotitlán, in Jalisco.

We will now examine the role of setting in Rulfo's technique of creating reader disorientation. In order to carry out this part of the study, two broad categories of setting may be established: settings which may be characterized as skeletal, and settings which are described in considerable detail but in such a way as to prevent the reader from forming a clear idea of them. The former give the reader a few of the elements of the setting but no details whatsoever, so that the surroundings are suggested but in no way made clearly apprehensible. Important to this technique is the use of unmodified nouns, such as el corral or una silla, which give us an object but do not characterize it. The latter basically consist of nebulous elements which tend to

shroud and blur the reader's apprehension of the setting, and which can be used to surround the setting in an aura of imprecision, ambiguity, and mystery. About half of the stories are in the first category of setting, and about half fall partially into both categories. We will study the stories following this order.

"Macario" is a story in which the physical setting is very limited and incomplete. All we know is that the boy Macario is "sentado junto a la alcantarilla" (p. 9). It is night, an element which automatically limits the character's and the reader's ability to perceive the setting. Macario is waiting for the frogs to come out so he can kill them, thus permitting his godmother to sleep without being disturbed by their croaking. The image that we thus get of a boy sitting all alone by a sewer at night, with no further details of the background, fits the story well. We know only these details of the setting and are cut off from any other physical elements of it. Likewise we are prevented from a complete apprehension of the events of the story and the protagonist by the fact that the latter, an abnormal boy, is the only narrator. He is surrounded by night, and feels a certain kinship with darkness: "me meto otra vez en mi cuarto antes que me agarre la luz del día" (p. 12). The darkness of night effectively limits the possibility of our apprehending any of the elements which must be there, and the only elements of setting which Macario mentions are not qualified: we see them only as la alcantarilla, or mi cuarto, or el ocote.

The principal element in the setting of "Nos han dado la tierra," the plain, is described mostly in terms of what it is not, rather than in terms of what it is. This negative description emphasizes the



barrenness and uselessness of the land, as well as making it difficult for the reader to visualize clearly the setting. The men have been walking for hours "sin encontrar ni una sombra de árbol, ni una semilla de árbol, ni una raíz de nada" (p. 15). Describing the plain, the narrator says: "No, el llano no es cosa que sirva. No hay ni conejos ni pájaros. No hay nada" (p. 16).

It is as if the world on the plain were not a real world. This is pointed out by a contrast with the real world as it exists in the town across the plain. The two worlds are linked by the wind.

Se oye que ladran los perros y se siente en el aire el olor del humo, y se saborea ese olor de la gente como si fuera una esperanza.

Pero el pueblo está todavía muy allá. Es el viento el que lo acerca. (p. 15)

The sensorial images, even though they appear on the plain, are not in fact part of it but rather belong to the real world of the town to which they are headed. As they descend from the high plain into the real world, this world comes alive:

Por encima del río, sobre las copas verdes de las casuarinas, vuelan parvadas de chachalacas verdes. Eso también es lo que nos gusta.

Ahora los ladridos de los perros se oyen aquí junto a nosotros . . . . (p. 20)

The unreality of the plain is further emphasized by the episode in which a single large black cloud appears overhead. One drop of rain falls from the cloud "por equivocación" before it suddenly moves on toward the mountains, pushed by the wind which is blowing from the real world of the town.

"Es que somos muy pobres" begins with the statement "aquí todo va de mal en peor" (p. 31). The aquí, although extremely nebulous, is

expanded upon only slightly, when the narrator mentions "el solar" and "el tejabán." The principal element of the setting is a raging river, which also is described hardly at all. It first makes its presence known through sound: ". . . el estruendo que traía el río al arrastrarse me hizo despertar . . ." (p. 31). The noise continues louder and louder, but another element is added, that of smell: "Se oía, como se huele una quemazón, el olor a podrido del agua revuelta" (p. 31). In spite of the river's importance as the main element of setting, the reader's perception of it is limited by the fact that it is never adequately described in precise, objective visual terms, but rather in terms of its sound and its odor, both of which are more or less subjective and thus more difficult to perceive. We are told only that the water is "espesa y sucia" (p. 32). The river is also referred to as "la cosa aquella" (p. 32), again preventing the reader from forming a clear idea of what it is like. In this way it becomes more of a force than a physical element, able to exercise powers of life and death over living beings.

The river floods, runs up streets and into houses, and carries off familiar landmarks such as the old tamarind tree. Its strange hold over one of the characters, the narrator's sister, becomes apparent:

Por su cara corren chorretes de agua sucia como si el río se hubiera metido dentro de ella. (p. 35)

El sabor a podrido que viene de allá (the river) salpica la cara mojada de Tacha . . . . (pp. 35-36)

The river is the agent which causes the problem of the story: has the calf drowned in its raging waters, or has it been able to

survive? If the river, with its power of life and death over people, has killed the calf, then it has effectively covered its tracks.

Por el río rodaban muchas troncos de árboles con todo y raíces y él [a man working on the bank] estaba muy ocupado en sacar leña, de modo que no podía fijarse si eran animales o troncos los que arrastraba. (p. 33)

Thus it is the river and its mysterious forces which cause the enigmatic situation that remains unresolved as the story ends.

"¡Diles que no me maten!" has an absolute minimum of description of the physical elements of the story. The story opens with a dialogue in which there is no hint of what type of setting is involved. A moment later, Justino gets up from the rock pile on which he is sitting and walks to the corral gate, so in this way two components of setting are introduced, but not described. The reader may also imagine a cabin of some sort, when he reads: "Se habían detenido delante del boquete de la puerta. El, con el sombrero en la mano, por respeto, esperando ver salir a alguien" (p. 91). The only other element of this setting which is given is "un horcón" (p. 86) to which Juvencio is tied, but no description of it is given. Thus the reader must take these elements and try to put together a mental picture based on nothing more than an impressionistic sketch.

Also described are the early hours of the day on which Juvencio is captured. He first sees his captors as night is falling. They walk through the night and into the early morning hours, a dark morning with no stars. A wind is blowing, carrying dust and foul odors. The captors, who are in effect an extension of this setting, are referred to as "bultos." He cannot see their faces in the darkness, and we are

given no physical characteristics which would in any way distinguish them. Thus it can be seen that the elements of setting are presented only minimally in this story, and they give the reader only minimal assistance in organizing and understanding the facts of the story.

In "Acuérdate," the setting in which the narrator finds himself must be completely imagined by the reader. There are only three elements which help him to do so. The first is the reference to "río arriba" (p. 110), which suggests that the narrator must be near the site of a river. The second is the air of nostalgia which accompanies the story and which is created by the constant use of such expressions as acuérdate, or te debes acordar de él. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, this suggests at least one listener and possibly more, who probably have known each other all their lives. The reader can now imagine them in their middle or later years, perhaps sitting outside a house in the evening, reminiscing.

The third element which suggests a setting are the events of the narrative, which are filtered through time and the narrator's memory. In order for this element to be effective, the reader must assume that the events of the narrative and the place at which the narration is being given are approximately the same. Such an assumption would seem reasonable based on the reference to "río arriba," which apparently ties the two places together. As the narrator tells his story, he weaves into it the elements which suggest a town, without giving any detailed or definite qualifying adjectives. He mentions la iglesia, la peluquería, el camino real, and la plaza, without telling any more than that about them. This story is very nearly told without a

setting, thus leaving out an element which by its presence would heighten the reader's apprehension of the story.

Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá sees in "No oyes ladrar los perros" the typical Rulfian ambiguity, uncertainty, and mystery. In his study of the story, he constantly emphasizes the role which the reader's imagination must play in developing the setting. He notices that Rulfo offers the reader only the barest essentials of setting, thus forcing him to exercise his own creative powers in order to visualize the details.<sup>1</sup>

This story, like many others, is set at night. Of the very few elements which form the setting, only the moon and the man's shadow are described at all. Even then, the first description of the moon comes indirectly, through a simile: it is "como una llamarada redonda."<sup>2</sup>

The uncertainty which characterizes the setting is further evident when the father feels thick drops, "como de lágrimas" (p. 118), fall upon his head. There is no way to tell if they are actually tears, rain, or some other liquid such as the wounded son's blood, which is suggested by the fact that they are thick.

"Paso del Norte" is developed with an absolute minimum of setting involved, similar to "Acuérdate." In the first part of the story, a son has gone to his father to inform the latter of his impending trip north, and to ask the father to care for his family during his absence. This dialogue could take place at the father's residence, or his place of business, or even at a bar or some similar location. There is nothing given in the dialogue which would even let the reader construct

a setting in his own imagination.

In the last part of the story, the son is again dialoguing with his father, presumably (although not necessarily) at the same place where the opening dialogue took place. The son tells of his trip north, but the only element of setting which enters is set at night, as the braceros are crossing the river into the United States. Again, the night places an automatic limitation on the extent of setting which can be apprehended. They are suddenly shot by some unknown gunmen from an unknown position. All this is filtered again through time and the eyes of the son, passing on to the reader only the most meager vision of setting.

Rulfo's first publication, "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas," already exhibits his tendency to use a few, vague elements of setting which create, rather than a fairly complete setting, just a skeletal system which the reader must complete using his own resources.

The story may be seen as having two settings. Rulfo starts out describing the setting in which Crispín, the unborn child, finds himself. It is, metaphorically, a cradle, whose principal characteristic is total darkness. He does little to enhance the reader's apprehension of the story, by placing a character, as yet unborn, in a sort of limbo.

The setting in which Crispín's mother lives is hardly more complete. We see her walking about "los corredores" and "el pasillo," sometimes visiting the corral. On the fatal morning, she opens "la puerta," thus suggesting a house. Since it is cold, she returns to the closet to get a coat and climbs up onto the second step (we are

not told of what), and the story ends. The only elements of this setting which we see are those with which the character herself comes into contact, and these few elements are not in any way qualified. Thus the reader is forced to use his imagination to attempt to arrive at some satisfactory vision of the setting.

Whatever small amount of setting is used in "La herencia de Matilde Arcángel" is almost exclusively of the non-visual nature. Up until the narration of Matilde's death, the only elements of setting are some nondescript geographical places, such as Ereutemio Cedillo's farm, or the town of Corazón de María.

As the narrator reaches the part about Matilde's death, he begins to describe things in terms of their feeling, or sound. He describes the runaway horse which killed Matilde thus:

Pasó junto a nosotros como una nube gris, y más  
que caballo fue el aire del caballo el que nos  
tocó ver; solitario, ya casi embarrado a la  
tierra. (p. 58)

The narration continues without elements of setting, until the final scenes when father and son join rival revolutionary bands.

The first band has passed through town on horseback, but in such complete silence that the crickets and birds are still heard, as well as the music of the flute which the son had been accustomed to playing whenever the father got drunk. The sound of the flute joined itself with the revolutionaries as they passed by. The father then joined the opposing band, which came through the town a few days later. Although his departure on horseback is described in visual terms, the description is put in such a way as to effectively attenuate the

reader's detailed apprehension of the scene:

Era tan alto, como antes les decía, que más que hombre parecía una banderola por eso de que llevaba el greñero al aire, pues no se preocupó de buscar el sombrero. (p. 61)

After this, everything goes on calmly and quietly, until some rumors arrive of fighting on the mountain. The final day of the story passes uneventfully, and the night arrives. The church clock sounds the hour, the bellowing of a horn is heard, and then horses' hooves. A "desfile de figuras oscuras que apenas se distinguían en la noche" (p. 61) passes and then gradually the sound of a flute comes onto the scene. The predominance of non-visual elements, more difficult to describe and to imagine than visual elements, plus the background of night and the "figuras oscuras," make the setting a nebulous and imprecise feature of the story.

The minimal setting which accompanies "El día del derrumbe" is never described directly. We get no hint at all about the surroundings in which the two dialoguers find themselves. One might be tempted to assume that they are somewhere in the small town which is the subject of their story, but the only justification for so doing is the lack of alternatives. The reader is made to feel, rather than see, the presence of this town as he witnesses the dialogue between the characters. As they tell about the governor congratulating the village officials for their excellent barbecue, and hear their description of how the governor acted at the meal, we imagine the event, with the whole town present and a band playing. When the speaker refers to "afuera, en la calle" (p. 3) we realize it took place inside some building. We feel the presence of many people by the governor's addressing them



as "conciudadanos" and "Tuxcacuenses," by the applause which interrupts his speech, and by the references to "las mesas" of the barbecue. However, the whole setting is given through impressions rather than descriptions, and in the main is a product of the reader's imagination rather than the author's. The reader cannot help but wonder about where the dialoguers are speaking from, as well as what the town is really like.

The setting of "Un pedazo de noche" is unique in that this is the only one of the twenty stories with an urban setting. Nevertheless, the basic techniques and their effects do not differ materially from others of Rulfo's stories. The story is set at night. The characters are looking for "un sitio medio oscuro," and they go down a "calle deslumbrada."

The use of unmodified nouns to name the elements of setting is again important in this story. We read "el hotel," "el pasillo," "un merendero," and find that these elements are indeed nebulous. Related to this technique is the use of place-names, such as "el jardín de Santiago," or "la calle de Valerio Trujano," which in reality do little to give the reader an objective picture of the setting.

At the end of the story, the narrator is falling asleep. As she gradually loses consciousness, she also loses sight of the setting, a loss which the reader shares, since his whole perception of it has been through this narrator. Auditory images briefly dominate: she hears someone sweeping the street with a broom, and hears a voice speak to her. She feels someone sit on the edge of her bed, and then falls asleep. If the reader were asked to reconstruct the setting of the

story, he would have trouble producing more than the barest sketch, for the elements are given undescribed, with little relationship among them.

The next group of stories has settings which are of the two types initially described in the present chapter. This combining of types still results in a setting which is incomplete, ambiguous, or otherwise not fully available for the reader's assimilation.

In the first part of "La Cuesta de las Comadres," the picture which the narrator paints for us of the Cuesta is one of relative peace and contentment. He himself did not leave, as the others did, because he liked it there, and because he was able to get along well with the Torricos, who owned the place. His feelings toward the area seem affectionate:

El lugar no era feo; pero la tierra se hacía pegajosa desde que comenzaba a llover, y luego había un desparramadero de piedras duras y filosas como troncos que parecían crecer con el tiempo. Sin embargo, el maíz se pegaba bien y los elotes que allá se daban eran muy dulces.  
(p. 22)

The author's sanguine attitude, which enables him to overlook the area's negative aspects and only see the good, does not prepare the reader for the violence which dominates the rest of the story.

If the reader tries to visualize the setting of the story, he will find it difficult due to the lack of specifics given by the author. We know it was at one time a community of some sixty people, with some houses scattered about, with a dozen and half green hills "allá abajo" (wherever that is). There is a cattle guard near a tall tree. The lack of adjectivation is a prime factor in the reader's inability to

form an adequate idea of the elements of the setting. Likewise, phrases such as "el lugar no era feo" (p. 22) contribute to an effect such as the one achieved in "Nos han dado la tierra": This phrase tells us what the Cuesta was not, but does little to enlighten us about what it was.

For the narration of the two crimes which are given explicitly in the story, the robbery of a muleteer and the murder of Remigio Torrico, the author has chosen a setting of night. The robbery of the muleteer is carried out in an undescribed place; the narrator tells us "no sabía adonde iba" (p. 25). Later he tells us "comenzó a oscurecer y cuando llegamos adonde estaba el arriero era ya alta la noche" (p. 25). The narrator has no idea of where he is, and neither does the reader. The night is used as a limiting factor on the setting; the reader receives the setting through the narrator, who himself cannot perceive it because of the night.

Later, as dawn breaks, a light wind comes up and covers the sounds that the narrator's companions had been making, thus cutting him off from them and leaving him, for a while, alone in undescribed territory.

A Halloween-like setting attends the murder of Remigio Torrico. It is on a dark October night. A shadowy aura of mystery, not unlike that found in other stories, is created by the light of the moon, and the flights of buzzards. The only elements which stand out from the blanket of night are those which the moonlight touches, but even then they are seen incompletely. The narrator at first sees not his attacker, but the movement of the man's shadow.

After the actual murder, the moon slips behind some oak trees,

thus darkening the scene even more. We now see nothing, and the only elements of setting which play a part are the sounds of skyrockets at a nearby fiesta and the sound of buzzards, both of a transitory nature. Thus the setting practically disappears at the end of the story.

Each of the two parts into which "El hombre" is divided has its own setting. The setting of the first part is in itself divided into two parts, the mountain and the river.

Rather than present a description of the mountain, Rulfo evokes its presence through a series of suggestive elements:

La vereda subía, entre yerbas, llena de espigas y malasmujeres. Parecía un camino de hormigas de tan angosto. Subía sin rodeos hacia el cielo. Se perdía allá y luego volvía a aparecer más lejos, bajo un cielo más lejano. (p. 37)

. . . Detrás de un horizonte estaba otro y el cerro por donde subía no terminaba . . . . (p. 38)

Llegó al final. Sólo el puro cielo, cenizo, medio quemado por la nublazón de la noche. La tierra se había caído para el otro lado. (p. 38)

This type of description, in which a picture of the setting is given by means of impressions rather than by focusing upon the element which is to be described and giving a straightforward presentation, in detail, of its characteristics, cannot help but leave the reader with the feeling that there are many details which have been omitted. This further elicits greater mental effort from the reader in order for him to realize exactly what is happening. For example, in the above cited phrase, "la tierra se había caído para el otro lado," the reader needs a moment to realize that the character has now reached the top of the

mountain.

The river is presented in such a way as to shroud it in an aura of mystery. It is no ordinary river, and evokes a feeling that some terrible but inexplicable evil force lurks within it, somewhat in the manner of the river of "Es que somos muy pobres."

Muy abajo el río corre mullendo sus aguas entre sabinos florecidos; mediendo su espesa corriente en silencio. Camina y da vueltas sobre sí mismo. Va y viene como una serpentina enroscada sobre la tierra verde. No hace ruido. Uno podría dormir allí, junto a él, y alguien oiría la respiración de uno, pero no la del río. La yedra baja desde los altos sabinos y se hunde en el agua, junta sus manos y forma telarañas que el río no deshace en ningún tiempo.

El hombre encontró la línea del río por el color amarillo de los sabinos. No lo oía. Sólo lo veía retorcerse bajo las sombras. (p. 39)

El río en estos lugares es ancho y hondo y no tropieza con ninguna piedra. Se resbala en un cauce como de aceite espeso y sucio. Y de vez en cuando se traga alguna rama en sus remolinos, sorbiéndola sin que se oiga ningún quejido. (p. 42)

This terrible force, which can be felt but not described or identified, makes its presence clear at the very end of the story when we see the hombre dead, face down in the river.

The identification of the water motif with inexplicable elements is also used as we witness the hombre murdering the family of his pursuer. Of the murderer, we are told: ". . . le salían chorretes de lágrimas. O tal vez era sudor" (p. 39). There is no way to distinguish which it is, and such a determination, were it possible, would explain much about the murderer, his basic psychology, how the reader reacts to him and, ultimately, how the reader reacts to the story as a whole.

Darkness is a dominant element of the setting, again creating a mood of mystery. The murder of the pursuer's family takes place on a cloudy night. The days are gray and cloudy. What light there is, is unclear and imprecise: "La luz se había borneado, volteando las sombras . . . ." (p. 42). This adds to the mysterious air of the story.

In the second part of the story, the narration is taking place probably in a courtroom or judge's chambers, or perhaps a prosecutor's office. The physical setting is never described, or even mentioned. The reader has to imagine it for himself, and the only clues he gets are the fact that the shepherd addresses his interlocutor as "señor licenciado" (p. 44) and the man's statement that:

¿De modo que ora que vengo a decirle lo que sé, yo salgo encubridor? Pos ora sí. ¿Y dice usted que me va a meter en la cárcel por esconder a ese individuo? (p. 46)

By not presenting this setting, the author reinforces the effect that the reader gets, especially at the start of the second part, of being deceived as to what is actually taking place. The setting, if it had been given, could be the first clue that would tell the reader what was about to take place.

In his study of "En la madrugada," Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá puts great emphasis on the role of the setting and its elements in eliciting the ambiguity and mystery which are observable in the story.<sup>3</sup> For Rodríguez-Alcalá, the introduction and ending of the story are of special importance to demonstrate the technique in question. He notices, in the introduction, the presence of "factores difuminadores"

in the story's setting, such as shadows, fogs, clouds, vapor, and smoke, thus creating an aura of nebulosity. A similar atmosphere is present at the closing of the story, a fact which is important not only for maintaining this atmosphere of nebulosity but also, as Rodríguez-Alcalá has shown, for deceiving the reader with regard to the amount of time which has actually passed between the beginning and end of the story.<sup>4</sup> He sums the story up well by saying "la penumbra se insinúa por doquiera . . . . En el cuento todo, en suma. Y, también se adentra, difícil de disipar, en la psique del lector."<sup>5</sup>

The narrator of "Talpa" is somewhere in the town of Zenzontla, a village whose characteristics are never mentioned. Also unknown is the exact location of this narrator, whether it be a house, a bar, under a big tree, or whatever.

Regarding the journey from Zenzontla to Talpa, the narrator first talks about the nights. He and his sister-in-law would always seek the darkest place possible so that her ill husband would not discover their illicit love affair. The elements of setting which he describes are subjective: the heat of the earth and of his lover's body, and the cold breeze of dawn.

Nebulous, blurred elements dominate the days of the journey. The first of these elements which appears in the story is dust. As the pilgrims go along the path to Talpa, the dust surrounds them and they feel themselves

. . . entre la cerrazón del polvo que nos encerraba a todos en la misma vereda y nos llevaba como acorralados. Los ojos sequían la polvareda; daban en el polvo como si tropezaran contra algo que no se podía traspasar. (p. 60)

As in "En la madrugada," the present story also is beset by strange vapors and spots:

Y el cielo siempre gris, como una mancha gris y pesada que nos aplastaba a todos desde arriba. Sólo a veces cuando cruzábamos algún río, el polvo era más alto y más claro. Zambullíamos la cabeza acalenturada y renegrida en el agua verde, y por un momento de todos nosotros salía un humo azul, parecido al vapor que sale de la boca con el frío. (p. 60)

The sounds which they hear, especially at night as they rest from the day's walk, lend an element of vagueness or indefiniteness to the story. The pilgrims pray the rosary around bonfires:

Y se oía como el viento. Llevaba y traía aquel rumor, revolviéndolo, hasta hacer de él un solo mugido. Poco después se quedaba quieto. A eso de la medianoche podía oírse que alguien contaba muy lejos de nosotros. (p. 62)

The setting which we find in the village of Talpa is dominated by a cacophony of sounds. Inside the church, Tanilo is shouting his prayers to hear that he is praying, and the priest is delivering a sermon. When he finishes, the people pray aloud, making a noise "igual al de muchas avispas espantadas por el humo" (p. 64). Outside the church there is also a series of sounds:

Afuera se oía el ruido de las danzas; los tambores y la chirimía; el repique de las campanas. (p. 64)

These elements of setting are quite transitory; they make their impression and then pass. The reader is unable to characterize Talpa in any other way and thus does not really know what its characteristics are.

Perhaps the essence of Rulfo's use of setting has been described



by Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, who says, referring to "El llano en llamas,"

El lector que quisiera hacerse una composición de lugar exacta o, mejor dicho, objetiva, conforme a detalles inequívocos del texto y, por consiguiente, similar a la que otros lectores puedan hacerse, fracasaría. Las imágenes que se les susciten serán siempre subjetivos en el caso supuesto; subjetiva en el sentido de ser suyas y únicamente suyas porque el lector mismo--éste, ése, aquél-- es quien ha de verse obligado a figurarse el escenario con un máximo de colaboración con el autor y un mínimo de precisiones por éste ofrecidas.<sup>6</sup>

In his analysis of the opening scenes of "El llano en llamas," Rodríguez-Alcalá emphasizes the imprecision of the elements which Rulfo selects to form his setting, and the indirect manner with which he suggests them in order to create a setting based on impressions and suggestions rather than one which has definite, detailed characteristics. This is achieved through the use of auditory and tactile images as well as visual images.<sup>7</sup>

In the rest of the story Rulfo makes frequent use of elements which tend to shade the scene. When Alcalá, the messenger from Pedro Zamora, arrives at the protagonist's farm, he has with him the Zanates: "se les veía la cara prieta entre el pardear de la tarde" (p. 73). He also has with him three other men whom the protagonist does not know, thus adding to the scene an element of uncertainty.

As the band of men again sets out with Pedro Zamora, the sky is dark, and the fires which they light form great clouds of smoke. They continue setting fire to the countryside, thus producing more smoke, into and out of which they keep running like scarecrows. Smoke again appears as an element after the train wreck, when the dead bodies are all piled together and set afire. Appropriately, the scene is set at

dawn, when "la madrugada estaba empezando a dar luz a las cosas. Se veía ya casi claramente" (p. 80). The bandits could see their victims "medio ensombrecidos" (p. 80). Much of the action of the story takes place at night. As they flee the government troops, the narrator recalls the nights they spent "caminando sin hacer ruido" (p. 79), which in itself represents the removal of an element, sound, which could possibly aid the reader in characterizing the setting. He tells how they spent nights "con los ojos aturcidos de sueño y la idea ida" (p. 79). All these elements prevent the reader from forming a clear and complete picture of the setting.

Certain of the characters blend into the setting as simply another shapeless, formless element. The narrator's enemies are just "los hombres de Olachea" or los federales," while his allies have faces "como de requesón" and "siempre andaban ensarapados."

They are hardly more human than the sabotaged railroad locomotive, which "caminaba y jadeaba" and "daba unos silbatazos roncós y tristes y muy largos" (p. 80). The only description we get of this train is its death rattle, which is a most subjective presentation of this element of setting.

After the narrator and his band scattered, and the government troops pursued them, they would frequently come upon a friend hanged from "cualquier palo de algún camino" (p. 81). The buzzards would then attack the dead person, leaving just a shell "campaneándose al soplo del aire" (p. 82). Such indefinite and nebulous place-descriptions almost leave the reader with the feeling that the story is taking place in a limbo. There is likewise no physical description of the jail in which the narrator spent several years. It is simply "la cárcel,"

and is further removed from the reader's ability to conceive of it because of its distance in time from the time of narration. The present location and surroundings are also completely ignored by the narrator, as if they did not exist.

Luis Leal has recognized the central role of setting in "Luvina" in his article "El cuento de ambiente: 'Luvina' de Juan Rulfo." He sees in the story two worlds, one within the ~~other~~: The objective world of the tavern in which the narration is taking place, and the subjective, imprecise, vague world of San Juan Luvina itself. The frequent interplay or intermingling of these two worlds, plus the fact that the reader enters the world of Luvina through the real, objective world, force the reader to be alert and keep them separate in his mind.

The real world is set at night. It is described only sketchily, with the author mostly suggesting rather than describing the tavern. The basic elements of this world are heard rather than seen. Early in the story, we read:

Hasta ellos llegaban el sonido del  
río . . . ; el rumor del aire . . . y los  
gritos de los niños . . . . (p. 95)

These same elements enter in once again as the story ends:

Afuera seguía oyéndose cómo avanzaba  
la noche. El chapotéo del río contra los  
trancos de los camichines. El griterío ya  
muy lejano de los niños. (p. 104)

The preponderance of auditory rather than visual stimuli does not help the reader form a complete picture of what this tavern is like, thus adding to the feeling of incompleteness that is so typical in the stories of Rulfo.

The subjective world of Luvina is presented through a combination of the factores difuminadores which we have already seen, especially in "En la madrugada," and negative description similar to that used in "Nos han dado la tierra." In spite of the fact that the story seems to begin with a lengthy description of Luvina and its environs, Rulfo is again fooling the reader because if one tries to mold all the information given into a composite mental picture of what Luvina's distinguishing characteristics are, he will find that he in fact has little concrete information with which to work.

The reader receives almost immediately a gray-white image of Luvina, one which does little to point out Luvina's features (if indeed it has any).

Está plagado de esa piedra gris con la que hacen la cal . . . (y) la tierra de por allí es blanca y brillante. (p. 94)

The wind which continually blows is dark, an "aire negro" (p. 95) which enters every nook and cranny of the town. The whole area is covered with a kind of atmospheric blackout:

Allí todo el horizonte está desteñido; nublado siempre por una mancha caliginosa que no se borra nunca. Todo . . . (está) envuelto en el calín ceniciento. (p. 95)

Even people who are actually in Luvina sometimes have trouble identifying their surroundings. As the narrator and his wife sleep in the church, at dawn she thinks she hears a noise:

- "¿Qué es? -me dijo.  
- "¿Qué es qué? -le pregunté.  
- "Eso, el ruido ese.  
- "Es el silencio. Duérmete . . . .  
"Pero al rato oí yo también. Era como un aletear de murciélagos en la oscuridad, muy cerca de nosotros. (p. 100)

The noise gets louder until the narrator gets up and goes to see what it is.

Vi a todas las mujeres de Luvina con su cántaro el hombre, con el rebozo colgado de su cabeza y sus figuras negras sobre el negro fondo de la noche. (p. 100)

He speaks to them briefly and then "como si fueran sombras" (p. 101) they leave with their black water jars.

Rulfo takes care, in his description of Luvina, to avoid elements which one might use to establish the uniqueness of any aspect of the town. Day and night are equally cold. The hills are bald, "sin un árbol, sin una cosa verde para descansar los ojos" (p. 95). The wind will not even let the nightshades grow. The plaza is "sola, sin una sola yerba" (p. 98). The church is "solitaria" (p. 98) and "un jacalón vacío, sin puertas, nada más con unos socavones abiertos y un techo resquebrajado por donde se colaba el aire como por un cedazo" (p. 99). There is no hotel nor an inn, so they sleep behind the "altar desmantelado" (p. 99) of the church. Most of the description of the town focuses upon what is not there, rather than what is, or on elements which do not retain their typical configuration (such as "altar desmantelado") and thus would not be familiar and identifiable to the reader. This is carried further in the narrator's final, subjective summation of what Luvina is:

Pero aquello es el purgatorio. Un lugar moribundo donde se han muerto hasta los perros y ya no hay ni quien le ladre al silencio; pues en cuanto uno se acostumbra al vendaval que allí sopla, no se oye sino el silencio que hay en todas las soledades. (p. 104)

Typically, the elements which characterize Luvina by their presence are silence, solitude, and sadness, all of which are abstractions and

very difficult to describe in a way that everyone could agree upon.

The first part of "La noche que lo dejaron solo" is set at night, which is, as we have seen, a factor which immediately limits the observer's ability to apprehend the surroundings. The only elements of the setting which we are given are the mountain path, the sound of the narrator's steps, his cold sweat, a few trees, some moss, the cold ground, and the air fragrant with the smell of turpentine. The emphasis is on Feliciano Ruelas' reaction to the various stimuli of his environment. Since these are mainly non-visual, they are again not of the type most easily recognized and conceptualized by him and by the reader, since it is generally easier to visualize something which is described rather than imagine how it sounds or feels or smells. Furthermore, the elements of the surroundings are presented but not described, thus making them qualify as impressions.

The second part of the story takes place the morning of the following day. The sun is just coming up, the plain presents a grayish aspect, and the light is still dim. As he comes down the mountain, Feliciano sees some soldiers reflected in the light of several bonfires. When he gets closer, he makes out his two uncles, hanging in the corral, enveloped in the smoke of the bonfires, their eyes clouded and their faces blackened. Feliciano immediately steals away in order to escape this fate, runs down a dry creekbed, and disappears into the plain. Thus the setting of the final scenes combines Rodríguez-Alcalá's "factores difuminadores" with minimal description of detail to form only the most minimal idea of a setting in the reader's mind.

"Anacleto Morones" is set on the small farm of the protagonist, Lucas Lucatero. The story starts about noon, and it is probably hot, since the characters are perspiring a great deal. Very few elements of this isolated place are given; there is some sort of house or cabin, with a kitchen and a porch, onto which the protagonist drags some chairs. There is also a corral with some chickens and a pile of stones which seems to the protagonist to have "la figura de una sepultura" (p. 130), which causes him to scatter the pile about the corral. This pile of rocks is the only element of the story which is given even minimal description. Other elements of setting are given, typically, without any adjective that might characterize them. Thus we see "el corral," "el corredor," and "unas sillas."

There is a road leading up to the farm, along which come the women who are going to visit Lucas. A cloud of dust rises up from the road and covers the women's faces. They are all dressed in black, and their only distinguishing feature, aside from the fact that they are old and ugly, are the large black scapularies which they wear. Their hair is stuck to their faces from the perspiration, "como si les hubiera llovizado" (p. 127). There is hardly a distinguishing feature given about them; they have come "entre el calor" and are covered with dust. We get an impression of them and not a description.

The story ends at dawn, thus suggesting a dimly lit situation. We are not told where the action is taking place. Since we know that one of the women promised to spend the night (just until dawn) with Lucas, we might assume that they are in his house, or on his farm, or even on the road back to town. The only element of setting which we are given, however, is the suggestion of dim light. The reader is

left to imagine the rest for himself.

"Un cuento" is set in the most extreme heat of August. This extreme heat has a soporific effect on the characters, which in turn effects the reader's perception of the story, since it is narrated by one of the characters. The hot sun, "blanco de luz" (p. 105) also interferes with the reader's perception of the setting:

En la reverberación del sol, bajo un cielo sin nubes, la llanura parece una laguna transparente desecha en vapores por donde se trasluce un horizonte gris. Más allá una línea de montañas esfumadas, desvanecidas en la distancia. Y todavía más allá la más remota lejanía. (p. 106)

The apparently unreal aspect of the setting, which fits well with the type of story in question, is strengthened by other aspects. As the narrator and his companion go down into Tuxcacuexco they leave behind the air and enter "el puro calor sin aire. Todo parecía quieto como en espera de algo" (p. 106). When the narrator finally notices the town, he asks the muleteer why it seems such a lonely place, as if no one lived there. His answer, "Aquí no vive nadie" (p. 108). This is hardly the setting which the reader is expecting, because he already knows that the town which the narrator and the muleteer are about to enter is the home of Pedro Páramo.

The setting of a literary work can often have a function of reinforcing or reflecting other aspects of the work. The background against which the action takes place can sometimes tell the reader much about the rest of the work. In the case of the short stories of Juan Rulfo, the settings serve to reinforce the effect of keeping the details of the story from the reader. The carefully-created ambiguity



and mystery of the settings are important factors in the over-all effect which Rulfo's technique creates.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hugo Rodríguez-Alcalá, p. 31, pp. 37-42.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-27.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-71.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to focus on certain technical elements which have continuity throughout the stories and which are responsible for the effect of reader disorientation which is detectible in all of them. It must be noted that an interplay of techniques is important in creating the effect of disorientation. The best example of one technique influencing another and thus the effect achieved is found in "En la madrugada." The manipulation of the time element, a prime factor in reader disorientation in this story, is brought about in part through the use of nearly identical settings at two points which are far-removed in time, to make it appear that they are in fact part of the same day. The time element is further manipulated through narrator changes and withholding certain basic information; thus we see that the total effect achieved in the story depends on the four techniques working together.

In some stories, a given technique may be of less consequence than in others. In "Macario," for instance, the role of setting is not as important as it is in "En la madrugada," or in "Es que somos muy pobres," where the river (the principal element of setting) creates the unresolved enigma with which the story ends. Probably the technical element which has the greatest single role in creating reader disorientation in "Macario" is Rulfo's method of communicating the

facts of the story to the reader.

An interesting aspect of Rulfo's technique which must not be overlooked is the cumulative effect of these stories on the reader. As one becomes more familiar with Rulfo's works, one begins to look for deceptions which do not exist. Thus the reader can find himself disoriented when he is reading a straightforward passage, simply because he is expecting to be disoriented. In effect, the reader disorients himself because he has been conditioned for disorientation.

While Rulfo's stories almost exclusively deal with lo popular, they are not aimed at the popular reader. An understanding of a given story is possible only after the reader has effected a penetration of the technique or combinations of techniques which Rulfo uses to carry out his narration.

Although many critics have stated that Rulfo's favorite type of narration is first-person, it can be seen from the present study that this is not the case. He uses several different types of narration and points of view with great success, often mixing various types within a single story. In fact, the story with only one type of narrator, such as "Macario," is the exception rather than the rule.

Rulfo's third-person narration can either be omniscient, such as in "La noche que lo dejaron solo," or non-omniscient, such as in "La vida no es muy seria en sus cosas." The third-person narrator can have a major role in telling the story, such as in the two stories just mentioned, or his function can be likened to that of stage directions in a play, inserted into character dialogue and doing little more than moving the characters within the setting such as in "Luvina." Authorial narration is also used to give indirect interior monologue, such as in

"¡Diles que no me maten!"

The monologue is used in various ways. The presence or absence of an audience to the monologue makes a difference in its effect upon the reader. Also important in the monologic type of narration is the tense used. When the present tense is used, the character-narrator almost seems to view the story from without, somewhat as a third-person narrator, rather than as a part of it. Interior monologues are also important, as noted in the previous paragraph.

A lesser-used type of narration is the dialogue. It is most commonly found in combination with other narrative modes. As with the monologue, an audience may or may not be present. Dialogues which exist autonomously, without the guidance of an outside narrator, necessarily contain within them the basic facts of the story, which are revealed slowly in the give and take of the conversation. Thus the method of communicating the story to the reader is controlled by the characters themselves. This is especially important in "El día del derrumbe," where the credibility of the authority, Melitón, is destroyed by the other character with whom he dialogues at the end of the story, thus creating an aura of ambiguity around the whole narration.

The question of who the narrator is, is always vital in these stories. It is not always easy to establish this, for example in a story like "Luvina," where what at first appears to be authorial narration is in fact character narration. The constant, obvious changing of narrators, such as in "En la madrugada," or the subtle, nearly undetectable change such as in "La noche que lo dejaron solo" make instability the key feature of point of view.

In spite of numerous critical opinions to the contrary, the

denial of time is only one way in which Rulfo uses the time element. Critics who hold that all of Rulfo's stories are atemporal apparently base their opinions on only a few stories. A common error in Rulfian criticism has been that of applying equally to all the stories a conclusion drawn from just a few of them. Such an approach to Rulfo has only limited application because of the diversity found in the twenty stories. Furthermore, the five stories which do not form part of El llano en llamas have only limited availability, thus making it difficult for everyone interested in Rulfo to read them. Therefore, it is doubtful whether many critics who refer to "Rulfo's stories" are in fact familiar with any but those in the collection.

Like many other contemporary authors, Rulfo likes to use unorthodox temporal structures in many of his stories. He may vary the rate of time flow, stop time on one level but not on another, let it stop and then go, or deny it completely. Regardless of which type of time is found in a particular story, the result is a personal view of time.

The actual application of time manipulation varies tremendously from story to story, even within the three categories of time which were established to carry out that part of the study. In the category of stories where time flows at different rates, the effect is achieved in "El llano en llamas" by varying the amount of action given, while in "Paso del Norte" the effect is achieved by mixing dialogue with other modes of narration. This also provides another example of the interdependence of the technical elements identified in this study.

Among the group of stories in which time flows and is suspended, these effects are achieved by similarly diversified methods.

Although both a story like "Macario" and another like "¡Diles que no me maten!" belong to this group, the methods used in the two stories differ greatly due to the mode of narration: a first-person narration in the former versus mixed modes in the latter.

The denial of the possibility of the flow of time is also the result of several methods. For example, in "Luvina" this is accomplished through the process described by Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, of repetition of phrases and ideas, but in "Un cuento" it is accomplished by the mixing of past, present, and future verb tenses to destroy the boundaries between them.

In order to understand any story, the reader must have available to him certain facts, which must fit together and function as a type of system. The method by which the author communicates these facts to the reader can control the ease with which the latter is able to apprehend and appreciate the story. In the case of Juan Rulfo, we have seen that he depends heavily upon the reader's mental dexterity to establish and order these facts. He tells his stories with an apparent simplicity which is, typically, deceptive. This same approach to reality is also reflected in Rulfo's creation of setting. It is not important whether he chooses a setting which is given minimally or one which is more complete; the reader nevertheless must exercise his own mental powers in collaboration with the author.

As has been previously stated, Rulfo is not an author for the casual reader. The complexities of his technique require rather a reader who is willing to work with them in order to appreciate his creative capacity. For the reader who is willing to do so, much satisfaction and enjoyment can be thus derived.

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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